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Claude G. Montefiore

ROSE, BLANCHE,
AND
VIOLET.

BY

G. H. LEWES, Esq.

AUTHOR OF "RANTHORPE;"
"A BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY," ETC. ETC.

Il n'y a point de vertu proprement dite, sans victoire sur nous-mêmes, et tout ce qui ne nous coûte rien, ne vaut rien.

DE MAISTRE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

1848.

London:
Printed by STEWART and MURRAY,
Old Bailey.

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DÉDICACE.

A MONSIEUR BENJAMIN MOREL

(DE DUNKERQUE),

COMME UN

AFFECTUEUX SOUVENIR

DE L' AUTEUR,

G. H. LEWES.



P R E F A C E.

WHEN a distinct Moral presides over the composition of a work of fiction, there is great danger of its so shaping the story to suit a purpose, that human nature is falsified by being coerced within the sharply defined limits of some small dogma.

So conscious of this did I become in the progress of my story, that I was forced to abandon my original intention, in favour of a more natural evolution of incident and character; accordingly, the Moral has been left to shift for itself. It was a choice

between truth of passion and character, on the one hand, and on the other, didactic clearness. I could not hesitate in choosing the former.

And yet, as Hegel truly says, “in every work of Art there is a Moral; but it depends on him who draws it.” If, therefore, the reader insists upon a Moral, he may draw one from the passions here exhibited; and the value of it will depend upon his own sagacity.

From Life itself I draw one great moral, which I may be permitted to say is illustrated in various ways by the present work; and it is this:—

Strength of Will is the quality most needing cultivation in mankind. Will is the central force which gives strength and greatness to character. We over-estimate the value of Talent, because it dazzles us; and

we are apt to underrate the importance of Will, because its works are less shining. Talent gracefully adorns life; but it is Will which carries us victoriously through the struggle. Intellect is the torch which lights us on our way; Will, the strong arm which rough hews the path for us. The clever, weak man sees all the obstacles on his path; the very torch he carries, being brighter than that of most men, enables him, perhaps, to see that the path before him may be directest, the best,—yet it also enables him to see the crooked turnings by which he may, as he fancies, reach the goal without encountering difficulties. If, indeed, Intellect were a sun, instead of a torch,—if it irradiated every corner and crevice—then would man see how, in spite of every obstacle, the direct path was the only safe one, and he would cut his way through

by manful labour. But constituted as we are, it is the clever, weak men who stumble most—the strong men who are most virtuous and happy. In this world, there cannot be virtue without strong Will; the weak “know the right, and yet the wrong pursue.”

No one, I suppose, will accuse me of deifying Obstinacy, or even mere brute Will; nor of depreciating Intellect. But we have had too many dithyrambs in honour of mere Intelligence; and the older I grow, the clearer I see that Intellect is *not* the highest faculty in man, although the most brilliant. Knowledge, after all, is not the greatest thing in life: it is not the “be-all and the end-all here.” Life is not Science. The light of Intellect is truly a precious light; but its aim and end is simply to shine. The moral nature of man is more sacred in my eyes than his intellectual

nature. I know they cannot be divorced — that without intelligence we should be brutes—but it is the tendency of our gaping wondering dispositions to give pre-eminence to those faculties which most astonish us. Strength of character seldom, if ever, astonishes; goodness, lovingness, and quiet self-sacrifice, are worth all the talents in the world.

KENSINGTON, *March 1848.*



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ROSE, BLANCHE, AND VIOLET.

PROLOGUE.

1835.

IT was a sultry day in July, and the sun was pouring down from a cloudless heaven intense rays upon the High-street of * * * * * The heat made the place a desert ; more indeed of a desert than even High-streets of country towns usually are. There was a burnt odour in the atmosphere, arising from the scorched pavement, and rayed forth from the garish brick houses. Silence and noon-day heat reigned over the scene. The deep stillness was brought out into stronger relief by the occasional bark of a dog, or rumbling of a solitary cart.

A few human beings dotted the street, at wide intervals. There was a groom standing at the stable-yard entrance of the Royal George, indolently chewing a blade of grass.

The clergyman's wife, hot, dusty, and demure, was shopping. A farmer had just dismounted from a robust white cob, which he left standing at the door of a dismal red-brick house, on the wire blinds of which was painted the word—**BANK**. Higher up, three ragged urchins were plotting mischief, or arranging some game. A proud young mother was dandling her infant at a shop door, as if desirous that the whole street should be aware of the important fact of her maternity—to be sure, there never was such a beautiful baby before! In the window of that shop—it was a grocer's—a large black cat was luxuriously sleeping on a bed of moist sugar, sunning herself there, too lazy even to disturb the flies which crowded to the spot.

To one who, a stranger to the place, merely cast his eyes down that street, nothing could appear more lifeless—more devoid of all human interest—more unchequered by the vicissitudes of passion. It had the calm of the desert, without the grandeur. In such a place, the current of life would seem monotonously placid; existence itself scarcely better than vegetation. It is not so, however. To those who inhabited the place, it was known that beneath the stillness a stratum of boiling lava

was ever ready to burst forth. Every house was really the theatre of some sad comedy, or of some grotesque tragedy. The shop which to an unfamiliar eye was but the depository of retail goods, with John Smith as the retailer, was to an inhabitant the well-known scene of some humble heroism, or ridiculous pretension. John Smith, smirking behind his counter, is not simply an instrument of commerce; he is a husband, a father, and a citizen; he has his follies, his passions, his hopes, and his opinions; he is the object of unreckoned scandals.

To the eye of the stranger who now leisurely paced the street, the town was dull and lifeless, because it had not the incessant noise of a capital, and because he knew nothing of the dramas which were being enacted within its walls. Yet even he was soon to learn that sorrow, "not loud but deep," was weeping ineffectually over a tragedy which touched him nearly.

He was a man of about thirty years of age, with the unmistakeable look of a gentleman, and, to judge from his moustaches and erect bearing, an officer in the army. As he passed her, the proud young mother ceased for a moment to think only of her child, and followed with admiring eyes his retreating form.

The echo of his sharp, decisive tread rang through the silent street ; and soon he disappeared, turning up towards a large house which fronted the sea.

He knocked at the door, and with an unconscious coquetry smoothed his dark moustache while waiting. The door was opened by a grey-haired butler.

“ How d’ye do, Wilson ? Are they at home—eh ! what’s this ? you in mourning ? ”

“ Yes, sir. What ! don’t you know, sir ? ”

“ Good God ! what has happened ? Is Mrs. Vyner — ? ”

“ Yes, sir, yes,” replied the butler, shaking his head sorrowfully. “ It has been a dreadful blow, sir, to master, and to the young ladies. She was buried Monday week.”

The stranger was almost stupefied by this sudden shock.

“ Dead ! ” he exclaimed ; “ dead ! Good God ! — So young, so young.—Dead ! — So beautiful and good.—Dead ! ”

“ Ah, sir, master will never get over it. He does take on so. I never saw any one, never ; and the young ladies — ”

“ Dead ! ”

“ Will you please to walk up, sir ? Master would like to see you.”

"No, no, no."

"It will comfort him; indeed, sir, it will. He likes to talk to any one, sir, about the party that's gone."

The tears came into the old man's eyes as he thus alluded to his lost mistress, and the stranger was too much affected to notice the singular language in which the butler spoke of "the party."

After a few moments' consideration, the stranger walked up into the drawing-room, while the servant went to inform Mr. Vyner of the visit. Left to himself, and to the undisturbed indulgence of those feelings of solemn sadness by which we are always affected at the sudden death of those we know, especially of the young — shaking us as it does in the midst of our own security, and bringing terribly home the conviction of that fact which health and confidence keep in a dim obscurity, that "in the midst of life we are in death" — the stranger, whom we shall now name as Captain Heath, walked up to a miniature of the deceased, and gazed upon it in melancholy curiosity.

Captain Heath had lost a dear friend in Mrs. Vyner, with whom he had been a great favourite. To his credit be it said, that, al-

though the handsome wife of a man much older than herself, he had never for an instant misinterpreted her kindness towards him ; and this, too, although he was an officer in the Hussars. Theirs was truly and strictly a friendship between man and woman, as pure as it was firm ; founded upon mutual esteem and sympathy. Some malicious whispers were, indeed, from time to time ventured on—for who can entirely escape them ?—but they never gained much credence. Mrs. Vyner's whole life was an answer to calumny.

Meredith Vyner, of Wytton Hall, Devonshire, was the kindest if not the most fascinating of husbands. A book-worm and pedant, he had the follies of his tribe, and was as open to ridicule as the worst of them ; but, with all his foibles, he was a kind, gentle, weak, indolent creature, who made many friends, and, what is more, retained them.

There was something remarkable though not engaging in his appearance. He looked like a dirty bishop. In his pale puffy face there was an ecclesiastical mildness, which assorted well with a large forehead and weak chin, though it brought into stronger contrast the pugnacity of a short blunt nose, the nostrils of which were somewhat elevated and

garnished with long black hairs. A physiognomist would at once have pronounced him obstinate, but weak ; loud in the assertion of his intentions, vacillating in their execution. His large person was curiously encased in invariable black ; a tail-coat with enormous skirts, in which were pockets capacious enough to contain a stout volume ; the waistcoat of black silk, liberally sprinkled with grains of snuff, reached below the waist, and almost concealed the watch-chain and its indefinite number of gold seals which dangled from the fob ; of his legs he was as proud as men usually are who have an ungraceful development of calf ; and hence, perhaps, the reason of his adhering to the black tights of our fathers. Shoes, large, square, and roomy, with broad silver buckles, completed his invariable and somewhat anachronical attire.

People laughed at Meredith Vyner for his dirty nails and his love of Horace (whom he was always quoting, without regard to the probability of his hearers understanding Latin—for the practice seemed involuntary) ; but they respected him for his integrity and goodness, and for his great, though ill-assorted, erudition. In a word, he was laughed at, but there was no malice in the laughter.

As Captain Heath stood gazing on the miniature of his lost friend, a heavy hand was placed upon his shoulder ; and on turning round he beheld Meredith Vyner, on whose large, pale face sorrow had deepened the lines : his eyes were bloodshot and swollen with crying. In silence, they pressed each other's hands for some moments, both unable to speak. At last, in a trembling voice, Vyner said, “Gone, gone ! She's gone from us.”

Heath responded by a fervent pressure of the hand.

“ Only three weeks ill,” continued the wretched widower ; “ and so unexpected !”

“ She died without pain,” he added, after a pause ; “ sweetly resigned. She is in heaven now. I shall follow her soon : I feel I shall. I cannot survive her loss.”

“ Do not forget your children.”

“ I do not ; I will not. Is not one of them *her* child ? I will struggle for its sake. So young to be cut off !”

There was another pause, in which each pursued the train of his sad thoughts. The hot air puffed through the blinds of the darkened room, and the muffled sounds of distant waves breaking upon the shore were faintly heard.

“Come with me,” said Vyner, rising.

He led the captain into the bed-room.

“There she lay,” he said, pointing to the bed: “you see the mark of the coffin on the coverlet? I would not have it disturbed. It is the last trace she left.”

The tears rolled down his cheek as he gazed upon this frightful memento.

“In this room I sat up a whole night when they laid her in the coffin, and all night as I gazed upon those loved features, placid in their eternal repose, I was constantly fancying that she breathed, and that her bosom heaved again with life. Alas! it was but the mockery of my love. She remained cold to my kiss—insensible to the tenderness which watched over her. Yet I *could* not leave her. It was foolish, perhaps, but it was all that remained to me. To gaze upon her was painful, yet there was pleasure in that pain. The face which had smiled such sunshine on me, which had so often looked up to mine in love, that face was now cold, lifeless—but it was *hers*, and I could not leave it. My poor, poor girl!”

His sobs interrupted him. Captain Heath had no disposition to check a grief which would evidently wear itself away much more

rapidly by thus dwelling on the subject, than by any effort to drive it from the mind. To say the truth, Heath was himself too much moved to speak. The long, sharply-defined trace of the coffin on the coverlet was to him more terrible than the sight of the corpse could have been; it was so painfully suggestive.

"The second night," continued Vyner, "they prevailed on me to go to bed; but I could not sleep. No sooner did I drop into an uneasy doze, than some horrible dream aroused me. My waking thoughts were worse. I was continually fancying the rats would—would—ugh! At last, I got up and went into the room. Who should be there, but Violet! The dear child was in her night-dress, praying by the side of the bed! She did not move when I came in. I knelt down with her. We both offered up our feeble prayers to Him who had been pleased to take her from us. We prayed together, we wept together. We kissed gently the pale rigid face, and then the dear child suffered me to lead her away without a word. It was only then that I suspected the depth of Violet's grief. She had not cried so much as Rose and Blanche. I thought she was too young

to feel the loss. But from that moment I understood the strange light which plays in her eyes when she speaks of her mother."

He stooped over the bed and kissed it ; and then, quite overcome, he threw himself upon a chair, and buried his face in his hands. The ceaseless wash of the distant waves was now distinctly heard, and it gave a deeper melancholy to the scene. Captain Heath's feelings were so wound up, that the room was becoming insupportable to him, and desirous of shaking off these impressions, he endeavoured to console his friend.

"I ought to be more firm," said Vyner, rising, "but I cannot help it. I am not ashamed of these tears—

Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus
Tam cari capit is?

But I ought not to distress others by them."

He led the way down stairs, and, as the children were out, made Heath promise to return to dinner; "it would help to make them all more cheerful."

Captain Heath departed somewhat shocked at the pedantry which in such a moment could think of Horace; and by that very pedantry he was awakened to a sense of the

ludicrous figure which sorrow had made of Vyner.

We are so constituted that, while scarcely anything disturbs our hilarity, the least incongruity which seems to lessen the earnestness of grief, chills our sympathy at once. Vyner's quotation introduced into the mind of his friend an undefined suspicion of ✓ the sincerity of that grief which could admit of such incongruity. But the suspicion was unjust. It was not pedantry which dictated that quotation. Pedantry is the pride and ostentation of learning, and at that moment Vyner was assuredly not thinking of displaying an acquaintance with the Latin poet. He was simply obeying a habit; he gave utterance to a sentence which his too faithful memory presented.

Captain Heath walked on the sands musing. He had not gone far before his eye was caught by the appearance of two girls in deep mourning; a second glance assured him they were Vyner's daughters. Walking rapidly towards them, he was received with affectionate interest.

Quickly recovering from the depression which the sight of him at first awakened, they began with the happy volatility of childhood, to ask him all sorts of questions.

“But where is my little Violet?” asked the captain.

“Oh! she’s sitting on the ledge of a rock yonder, listening to the sea,” said Blanche.

“Yes,” added Rose, “it is very extraordinary—she says the sea has voices in it which speak to her. She cannot tell us what it says, but it makes her happy. But she cries a great deal, and that doesn’t look like happiness, does it, Captain Heath?”

“No, Rosebud, not very. But let me go to her.”

“Yes, do; come along.”

The three moved on together, and presently came to the rock, on a ledge of which a little girl was lounging. Her hat was off, and her long dark brown hair was scattered over her shoulders by the wind. Her face was towards the horizon, and she seemed intently watching.

From the two little traits of her drawn by her father and her sisters, Captain Heath, who had not seen her since she was a merry little thing of seven, anticipated a sickly precocious child, in whom reading or conversation had engendered some of that spiritual exaltation, which is mostly three parts affectation to one part disease. He was agreeably disappointed.

She had not noticed their arrival, but on being spoken to, embraced the captain with warmth, and received him in a perfectly natural manner.

To set his doubts at rest, he said :—

“ Well, Violet, has the sea been eloquent to-day, or is it too calm ?”

She looked up at him, then at her sisters, and coloured. “ I see they have been making fun of me,” she said ; “ but that’s not fair. I love to sit by the sea because—” she hesitated, “ mama loved it. It isn’t foolish of me, is it Captain Heath ?”

“ No, my dear, not at all—not at all.”

“ Oh, Captain Heath !” exclaimed Rose, “ you said just now it was.”

He pinched her little cheek playfully, and was about to reply, when Blanche said :—

“ Look, there is Mary Hardcastle walking with Mrs. Henley. Let us go and speak to them. I will introduce you, Captain Heath ; she’s very pretty.”

“ Another time,” replied he ; “ they seem to be talking very earnestly together.”

“ That they are.”

“ I hate Mary Hardcastle,” said Violet.

“ Why ? ”

“ I don’t know, but I hate her.”

"Silly child!" said Rose; "she's always saying kind things to you."

"And always doing unkind ones," rejoined Violet, sharply.

"Hate is a strong word, Violet," said Blanche.

"Not stronger than I want," replied the high-spirited little girl.

All this while the captain was following with his eye the retreating form of the said Mary Hardcastle.

Let us follow also.

"It is hopeless for me to expect my guardian will allow him to come," said that young lady, with great emphasis, to her companion; "you know how much he dislikes Marmaduke. So, unless you consent—you will, won't you?"

"I cannot resist you, Mary. But how is this interview to be arranged?"

"It is arranged. I was so *sure* of your goodness—I knew you would not let him leave England without seeing me once more, to say farewell; so I told him to call on you this very afternoon, because I was to spend the day with you. Thus, you see, it will all happen in the most natural manner."

Mrs. Henley smiled, shook her forefinger

at her young friend ; so they walked on, both satisfied.

Having gained this point, it soon occurred to Mary, that Marmaduke might be asked to dine and spend the evening ; but as this would expose Mrs. Henley to the chance of some one dropping in, and she was very averse to be supposed to favour these clandestine meetings, a steady refusal was given. Mary inwardly resolved that she would have a farewell meeting with her lover, and alone ; but said nothing more on the subject. To have a lover about to sail for Brazil, and to part with him coldly before others, was an idea no young girl could entertain, and least of all Mary Hardcastle. She was too well read in romance to think of such a thing.

It does not occur to every girl, in our unromantic days, to have a stern guardian who dislikes her lover, and forbids him the house. Mary, therefore, might consider herself as greatly favoured by misfortune ; her misery was as perfectly select as even her wish could frame, and the great, the thrilling climax—the parting—was at hand. That it should be moonlight was a matter of course—moonlight on the sea-shore.

Mary Hardcastle was just nineteen. There

was something wonderfully attractive about her, though it puzzled you to say wherein lay the precise attraction. Very diminutive, and slightly humpbacked, she had somewhat the air of a sprite—so tiny, so agile, so fragile, and cunning did she appear; and this appearance was further aided by the amazing luxuriance of her golden hair, which hung in curls, drooping to her waist. The mixture of deformity and grace in her figure was almost unearthly. She had a skin of exquisite texture and whiteness, and the blood came and went in her face with the most charming mobility. All her features were alive, and all had their peculiar character. The great defects of her face were, the thinness of her lips, and the cat-like cruelty sometimes visible in her small, grey eyes. I find it impossible to convey, in words, the effect of her personal charms. The impression was so mixed up of the graceful and diabolic, of the attractive and repulsive, that I know of no better description of her than is given in Marmaduke's favourite names for her: he called her his "fascinating panther," and his "tiger-eyed sylph."

She had completely enslaved Marmaduke Ashley. With the blood of the tropics in his veins, he had much of the instinct of the

savage, and as when a boy he had felt a peculiar passion for snakes and tigers, so in his manhood were there certain fibres which the implacable eyes of Mary Hardeastle made vibrate with a delight no other woman had roused. He was then only twenty-four, and in all the credulity of youth.

Everything transpired according to Mary's wish, and at nine o'clock she contrived to slip away in the evening, unnoticed, to meet her lover on the sands. True it was not moonlight. She had forgotten that the moon would not rise; but, after the first disappointment, she was consoled by the muttering of distant thunder, and the dark and stormy appearance of the night; a storm would have been a more romantic parting scene than any moonlight could afford. So when Marmaduke joined her, she was in a proper state of excitement, and felt as miserable as the most exacting school-girl could require. The sea, as it broke sullenly upon the shore, heaved not its bosom with a heavier sigh, than that with which she greeted her lover, and nestled in his arms. She wept bitterly, reproached her fate, and wished to die that moment. Marmaduke, who had never before seen such a display of her affection, was intensely gratified, and with

passionate protestations of his undying love, endeavoured to console her.

But she did not want to be consoled. As she could not be happy with him, her only relief was to be miserable. Self-pity was the balm for her wounds. By making herself thoroughly wretched, she stood well in her own opinion. In fact, without her being aware of it, her love sprang not from the heart, but from the head. She was acting a part in her own drama, and naturally chose the most romantic part.

The storm threatened, but did not burst. The heavens continued dark ; and the white streaks of foam cresting the dark waves were almost the only things the eye could discern. The lovers did not venture far from the house, but paced up and down, occasionally pausing in the earnestness of talk.

Their conversation need not be recorded here ; the more so as it was but a repetition of one or two themes, such as the misery of their situation, the constancy of their affection, and their sanguineness of his speedy return and their happy union.

“ Marmaduke,” she said at last, “ it is getting late ; Mrs. Henley will miss me ; I must go.”

“A moment longer ; one moment.”

“Only a moment. Dearest Marmaduke, will you never forget me? Will you think of me always? Will you write as often as you can? Let us every night at twelve look at the moon ; it will be so sweet to know that at that moment each is doing the same thing, and each thinking of the other. You will not lose my locket? But, stay ; you have never given me a lock of your hair. Do so now.”

He took a penknife from his pocket, and, with noble disregard to his appearance, cut off a large lock of his black hair, which he folded in a piece of paper and gave to her. She kissed it many times, and vowed its place should be upon her heart. Then, after throwing herself into his arms, in one last embrace of despair, she broke from him and darted into the house, rushed up into a bed-room, threw herself outside the bed, and gave way to so vehement a fit of crying, that when Mrs. Henley came in to look for her, she found her in hysterics.

Nota bene. — Sixteen months afterwards, Mary Hardcastle became Mrs. Meredith Vyner.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

FOUR YEARS LATER.

Messire Bon l'a prise en mariage,
Quoiqu'il n'ait plus que quatre cheveux gris;
Mais comme il est le premier du pays
Son bien supplée au défaut de son age.

LAFONTAINE.

My heroines have grown up into young women since we last saw them idling on the sands; and it is proper I should at once give some idea of their appearance. Rose and Blanche, children by the first wife, are very unlike their sister Violet, the only child of the second Mrs. Vyner: they are fair as Englishwomen only are fair; she is dark as the children of the south are dark. They are plump and middle-sized; she is thin and very tall. They are

settling into rounded womanhood; she is at that undeveloped “awkward age” when the beauty of womanhood has not yet come to fill the place of the vanished grace of childhood.

Two prettier creatures than Rose and Blanche, it would be impossible to find. There were sisterly resemblances peeping out amidst the most charming differences. I know not which deserved the palm; Rose, with her bright grey eyes swimming in mirth, her little piquant nose with its nostrils so delicately cut, her ruddy pouting lips which Firenzuola would with justice have called ‘fontana de tutte le amorose dolcezze,’ her dimpled cheeks; and the whole face, in short, radiant with lovingness and enjoyment. Shakspeare, who has said so many exquisite things of women, has painted Rose in one line:—

Pretty and witty, wild, and yet, too, gentle.

But then Blanche, with her long dreamy eyes, loving mouth, and general expression of meekness and devotion, was in her way quite as bewitching. As for poor Violet, she was almost plain: it was only those lustrous eyes, so unlike the eyes of ordinary mortals, which redeemed her thin shallow face. If plain, however, it has already great energy, great cha-

racter, and a strange mixture of the most womanly caressing gentleness, with haughtiness and wilfulness that are quite startling. Those who remember her as a lovely child, prophesy that she will become a splendid woman.

From the three girls, let us turn our eyes to the strange stepmother which fate—or rather foolishness and cunning—had given them.

Mary Hardcastle, at the age of twenty, was placed in perhaps the most critical position which can await a young woman, viz. that of stepmother to girls very little younger than herself. In that situation, she exhibited uncommon skill; the very difficulties of it were calculated to draw out her strategetical science in the disposition of her troops; and certainly few women have ever arranged circumstances with more adroitness than herself. She was a stepmother indeed, and the reader anticipates what kind of stepmother; but she was too cunning to fall into the ordinary mistake of ostensibly assuming the reins of government. Apparently, she did nothing; she was not the mistress of her own house; she never undertook the management of a single detail. A meek, submissive wife, anxious to gain the affection of her ‘dear girls,’ trembling before the responsibilities of her situation, she not only

deluded the world, but she even deceived Captain Heath, and almost reconciled him to the marriage. Nay, what was more remarkable, she deceived the girls—at least, the two elder girls. They were her companions—her pets. Before people, she adored them; in private, she gave them pretty clearly to understand that all their indulgences came from her; and all their privations from their father. It was her wish, indeed, that her dear girls should want for nothing, but papa was so obstinate—he could not be persuaded.

Strange discrepancies between word and deed would sometimes show themselves, but how was it possible to doubt the sincerity of one whose language and sentiments were so kind and liberal? She herself trembled before her husband, and often got the girls to intercede for her. The natural consequence was that they soon became convinced that papa was very much altered, and that as he grew older he grew less kind.

Altered he was. Formerly he had secluded himself in his study, interfering scarcely at all in family arrangements, making few observations upon what his children did; and if not taking any great interest in them, at least behaving with pretty uniform kindness. Now

he was for ever interfering to forbid this, to put a stop to that; discovering that he "really could not afford" that which hitherto he had always allowed them; and, above all, discovering that his daughters were always trying to "govern" in his house.

Violet alone was undeceived. She had always hated Mary Hardcastle, without precisely knowing why; now she hated her because occupying the place which her dear mother had occupied, and that, too, in a spirit of hypocrisy evident in her eyes. Violet, therefore, at once fixed the change in her father upon her stepmother. How it was accomplished, she knew not; but she was certain of the fact.

The mystery was simple. Meredith Vyner, like all weak men, had an irresistible tendency to conceal his weakness from himself, by what he called some act of firmness. He would have his own way, he said. He would not be governed. He would be master in his own house. Mrs. Vyner saw through him at a glance. Wishing to separate him from his children, and so preserve undisputed sway over him, she artfully contrived to persuade him that he had always suffered himself to be governed by his children, and that he had not a

will of his own. Thus prompted, he was easily moved to exert his authority with some asperity whenever his wife insinuated that it was disregarded; and he established a character for firmness in his own eyes, by thwarting his daughters, and depriving them of indulgences.

Moreover, Mrs. Vyner was, or affected to be, excessively jealous of his affection for the girls. He neglected her for them, she said ; of course she could not expect it to be otherwise, were they not his children? were they not accustomed to have everything give way to them? What was she? an interloper. Yet she loved him—foolishly, perhaps, but she loved him—and love would be jealous, would feel hurt at neglect.

Vyner, delighted and annoyed at this jealousy, assured her that it was groundless ; but the only assurance she would accept was acts, not words ; accordingly, the poor old man was gradually forced to shut his heart against his girls; or, at any rate, to cease his demonstrations of affection, merely to get peace.

In a few sentences I convey the result of months of artful struggle ; but the reader can understand the process by which this result was obtained, especially if I indicate the nature of the empire Mrs. Vyner had established.

Vyner was completely fascinated by the little coquette. It was not only his senses, but his mind, that was subdued. She had early impressed him with two convictions: one, the extreme delicacy of her nerves; the other, her immense superiority to himself. The first conviction was impressed upon him by the alarming hysterics into which contradiction, or any other mental affliction, threw her. If any thing went wrong—if the girls resisted her authority—if her own wishes were not gratified, she did not command, she did not storm; she wept silently, retired to her room, and was found there lifeless, or in an alarming state, by the first person who went in.

The second conviction took more time to establish, but she established it by perpetually dinging into his ear that he could not “understand her.” Nor, in truth, could he. She had a lively imagination, and was fond of the most imaginative poetry;—the less disposition he manifested towards it, the more she insinuated how necessary a part it was of all exalted minds. In her views of art, of life, and of religion, she was always exaggerated, and what the Germans call *schwärmerisch*. Vyner was as prosaic as prose, and owned his incapacity for “those higher raptures” which were said

to result from “an exalted ideal.” What we do not understand, we always admire or despise. Vyner admired.

One admirable specimen of her tactics was to make him feel that, although she loved him, she did not love him with all the ardour of her passionate nature ; and a hope was adroitly held out, that upon him only depended whether she should one day acknowledge that he had her entire affections. To gain this end, what man would not have made himself a slave ? If any man could resist such an attraction, Vyner was not that man ; and he submitted to every caprice, in the deluded hope of seeing his submission crowned with its reward.

In effect, Mrs. Vyner’s will was law ; yet so dexterously did she contrive matters, that it always seemed as if Vyner was the sole ordainer of everything. He was the puppet, moving as she pulled the wires, and gaining all the odium for her acts.

Violet, as I said, was the only one who saw this. She read her stepmother’s character aright ; and by her Mrs. Vyner knew that she was judged. She used her best arts to gain Violet’s good opinion, tried to pet her in every way, but nothing availed : the haughty girl was neither to be blinded nor cajoled.

One day Vyner found his wife in tears. He inquired the cause. She wept on, and could not be induced to speak. He entreated her to confide her sorrows to him, which, after long pressing, she did as follows :—

“ Oh ! it is very natural,” she said, sobbing ; “ very—I have no right to complain : none. I ought never to have married.”

“ Dearest Mary, *what* is the matter ?”

“ I have no right to be afflicted. I ought to have been prepared for it. Of course, it must be so. Yet I did hope to make them love me. I love them so. I tried all I could ; but I am a stepmother—every one will tell them that a stepmother is unkind.”

“ The ungrateful things !”

Vyner was really incensed against his daughters before he knew what they had done, simply because they were the cause of his conjugal peace being disturbed.

“ Rose and Blanche, indeed,” sobbed his wife, “ do give me credit sometimes, but Violet hates me—hates me because I married you. She is jealous of your regard for me. She says you ought never to have married again—perhaps she is right, but it is cruel for me to hear it.”

“ The wretched girl !”

"She will never forget I am not her mother —she looks upon our marriage as a crime, I believe!"

A spasm, short but sharp, was visible on his face; but the touch of remorse quickly gave way to anger. He felt, indeed, that he had acted wrongly in marrying again, especially in marrying one so young. He knew that well enough, knew what the world must think of it; but nothing, as she knew, made him so angry as any allusion to it. The sense of his fault exasperated his sense of the impertinence of those who ventured to speak of it. He had surely a right to do as he pleased. He loved a charming, a "most superior" woman, and he "supposed *he* was to be considered, no less than his children." It was very strange that he should be expected to sacrifice everything to them. Other fathers were not so complaisant.

And yet, through all the arguments which irritated self-love could suggest, there pierced the consciousness of his error. That Violet should resent his marriage was no more than natural; but his wife well knew the tender chord she touched, when she thus alluded to his daughter's feelings.

That day she said no more. She allowed

herself to be consoled. But by bringing up the subject again from time to time, she contrived to instil into his mind a mingled fear and dislike of his favourite child.

Whenever Violet and her stepmother had any “difference”—which was not unfrequent—Vyner always sided against his daughter; and his wife’s demeanour being one of exasperating meekness, as if she were terrified at Violet’s vehemence, he always told people that “his youngest daughter was unfortunately such a devil, there was no living with her, and that his wife was tyrannized over in a way that was quite pitiable.”

At last, Violet was sent away from home—that she might not corrupt her sisters, it was said—in reality, that she might be got out of the way. Vyner thereby secured peace, and his wife got rid of an unfavourable judge. The poor girl was placed under the care of two “strong-minded” women, who had been duly prejudiced against her, and whose cue it was to work upon her religious feelings, and awaken her to a sense of the duty she owed her *parents*. She soon detected their object, and rebelled. Disagreeable scenes took place, which ended in Violet escaping from their odious care, and flying to her fox-hunting uncle’s, in Worcester-

shire, where she was received with open arms. Being very fond of his niece, he wrote to Vyner, requesting permission to be allowed to keep her with him for some time, promising she should not want masters, and that her education should be carefully attended to. The permission was granted, after some difficulty, and Violet was happily settled in Worcestershire, while her two sisters, grown too handsome and too old to be kept longer at home, were despatched to the establishment kept by Mrs. Wirrelston and Miss Smith, at Brighton.

Before accompanying them, I have one more point to dwell on, and that was the sudden fit of economy which had seized Mrs. Vyner. The estate, though large, was greatly encumbered, and it was, moreover, entailed. Vyner, always “going” to make some provision for his girls, had never done so; he had,—weak, vacillating, procrastinating man as he was,—“put it off,” and trusted, perhaps, to the girls marrying well. Mrs. Vyner determined to economize; to save yearly a large sum, which was to be set aside. In pursuance of this plan, she began the most extraordinary retrenchments, and dressed the girls in a style of plainness and economy by no means in accordance with their feelings. In justice, I should

add, that she dressed herself in the same style. People were loud in their praises at her generous self-sacrifice ; but, as she sentimentally observed, “for her dear girls she could do anything.” Perhaps, of all her efforts at securing the reputation of an exemplary stepmother, none met with such universal approbation as this economical fit. I am sorry to be forced to add, that while economizing even to meanness, in some departments, she was so lavish in her expenditure in others, as, in effect, to plunge Vyner deeper into debt than ever.

CHAPTER II.

ROSE WRITES TO VIOLET.

DEAREST VI.,

YOUR letter amused us very much ; and we have both for a long while been going to answer it, but have not found time. Don't be angry at our silence.

We left home rather low spirited. Home, indeed, was no longer the happy place it had been, though mama, say what you will, is not to blame for that ; but, nevertheless, leaving it made us unhappy. Having grown up into young women without being sent to school, we did not like the idea of going at last.

The snow was falling fast when we arrived ; and a dreary January day by no means enlivened our prospects. We looked wistfully out of the carriage-windows, and saw the steady descent of the countless snow-flakes

darkening the air, and making the day miserable. Nothing met our eyes but the same endless expanse of snow-covered ground,—cheerless, cold, and desolate—the uncomfort of winter without its picturesqueness. But, cold and cheerless as the day was, it was nothing to the cheerlessness of the frigid politeness and patronizing servility of Miss Smith and Mrs. Wirrelston, our school-mistresses. I am a physiognomist, you know, and from the first moment, I disliked them. Blanche thought them very kind and attentive. I thought them too attentive : the humbugs !

They froze me. I foresaw the mistresses they would make, and that is why I instinctively felt that the miserable day was more genial and clement than they. The snow would cease ; in a few hours, gleams of sunshine would make it sparkle ; in a few weeks, it would disappear. But the wintry frost of their politeness would deepen and deepen into sterner cold ; there was no hope of sunshine under that insincere manner.

I hope you admire that paragraph ! But for fear you should imagine I am about to turn authoress, I must let you into the secret : it is an application to my situation of a passage I

met with yesterday in a novel one of the girls has smuggled in.

It was about four o'clock when we arrived. We were shown into the school-room, where we found about nine other girls, from twelve to seventeen years old, with whom we soon made acquaintance. We first asked each other's names; then communicated our parentage; then followed questions as to previous schools, and as to what sort of place this was. Accounts varied considerably. Some thought it very well, and liked Mrs. Wirrelston. Some thought it detestable, and detested Mrs. Wirrelston. One and all detested Miss Smith.

The elder girls seemed very nice; but, from always having been at school I suppose, they struck me as excessively ignorant of the world, compared with us, and still more ignorant of books. They were children to us. Our superior knowledge, which was quickly discovered, made us looked up to, and we were assailed with questions. But if we were for a moment looked up to on that account, we speedily lost our supremacy on another. One of the younger girls asked me how much pocket-money we had brought?

“Twenty shillings each.”

"Twenty shillings! what only twenty shillings! Why I brought five pounds."

"And I, ten," proudly ejaculated another.

I felt deeply ashamed; the more so as I observed the girls interchange certain looks, which were but too intelligible. Next day we had the mortification of hearing each new comer informed, and in a tone of disgusted astonishment, that "the Vyners had only brought twenty shillings each. Only think!"

I instantly wrote home to papa. But his answer was, that we must learn to be economical, that he was learning it himself, and that mama thinks it highly necessary we should early learn to submit to small privations. I hate economy!

To return to our school, however. The first afternoon was spent in chat and games. Lessons were not to commence till the morrow. And as the morrow was very much like other days, I may sketch our routine. While dressing, we have to learn a verse of scripture out of a book called "Daily Bread." (I got punished the other day for saying it was "very dry bread, too." That odious, little, pimply Miss Pinkerton told Miss Smith of it.) This verse we all repeat one after the other when prayers are finished; and as I seldom know my

verse when we come down, I contrive to sit at the end of the table and learn it by hearing all the others say it before me. One of the elder and one of the little girls then collect the bibles and put them away; while the rest of us, rank and file, begin to march, heads up, chests expanded, toes out. This military exercise is not, I believe, to fashion us into a regiment of grenadiers — the Drawing-room Invincibles—because, when I suggested that we ought to have moustachios and muskets, I received a severe reprimand for my levity. Besides, we vary the march with little operations scarcely to be called military : touching, or trying to touch, the floor with the tips of our fingers without bending our knees, making our elbows meet behind our backs, &c. We then go into breakfast, and are allowed to exchange our merciless slaughter of French idiom, for the freely flowing idiom of our mother tongue. I have not had the French mark yet, except for speaking English ; my French, I am happy to say, is beyond the criticism of the girls : what *their* mastery of the language is, you may guess by that ! You may also gain a faint idea of it from these specimens. I passed the mark to little Miss Pinkerton only yesterday, because she asked me for my penknife in this elegant

style : “*Madame, voulez vous prenez moi votre COUTEAU?*” Whereupon I whipped the mark into her hands with a generous “*Le voilà.*” Last week she said, “*Je n’ai pas encore FAIT;*” for “I have not done (finished) yet”—and pointed out to me, “*Comme vous avez mal coupé vos CLOUS*”—meaning, that I had not cut my finger nails well !

At meals, we are permitted to speak like Christians. After breakfast we have half an hour’s recreation. We play, or read, or work, or, twining an arm round our confidant’s waist, interchange confidences respecting the loves we have had, and the husbands we intend to have. Then come lessons. There are five pianos—and five unhappy girls are always practising on them. We arrange our lessons so as to take the pianos in turns, and by this means, we all get our practice, and the thumping never ceases. What a life those pianos lead ! How I wish Miss Smith were one of them !

The drawing-master comes at eleven. We don’t learn. Papa allows no extras, except dancing,—he says they’re “so foolish.” I am sorry we don’t learn, for Mr. Hibbert, our master, is a perfect duck!—such a nice face, with glossy hair, turned into a sweet little

curl on his forehead ; large whiskers, rosy complexion, and we all say he is consumptive. Then he draws so well—so boldly ! His strokes are as straight, and as broad and black as—I haven't got a simile. But you should see the copies he sets ; boats on the sea-shore, turned on their sides, with handsome fishermen standing by, occupied with their nets, and pretty, fat children dotting the sands ; or nice little cottages, with smoke (so natural !) coming from the chimneys, and large trees by them, and a dog or a cow, or else a splendid castle, with turrets, and drawbridges, and knights in armour on horseback. Mr. Hibbert ought to be an academician !*

At twelve, when the weather permits, we go out for a walk. In formidable files of twos and twos, we gravely tread the esplanade and *circumambient* streets (isn't that a nice word ?—I got it from Miss Smith). We there see withered old Indians, invalids in chairs, wheeled about in search of Hygeia, dowagers, and some officers, with such moustachios—the darlings !

* This last sentence makes me suspect that the whole paragraph is a bit of the saucy Rose's irony, and that she is quizzing the admiration of her schoolfellows for Mr. Hibbert. But school girls have such strange idols, that she *may* be serious here.—*Author's Note.*

We quiz the passers-by, and sometimes discuss their attractions. Some of the men look so *impudent!* And one always blows a kiss to us as we pass—that is, he blows it to *me*. I'm sure he's a rake.

At half-past two, we dress for dinner. At three, we dine. The food is plain, but good, and abundant. After dinner we have more lessons, till six. Then tea; then we amuse ourselves, if we have learned all our lessons and tasks, either with books or fancy-work. At eight, to bed.

All the days are like this, except Sunday; and oh! what a dreary day is Sunday! What with twice church, Collects to learn, explanations of the Psalms and Catechism, our day is pretty well occupied. We take no walk—we are allowed no recreation. “Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress,” and a few religious tales, are the only things allowed to those who have said Collect and Catechism, and have time to spare. I hate Bunyan!

But this is not all. If any one has had the three bad marks during the week, the punishment is to sit in the corner all Sunday, and learn a sermon: she is not allowed to speak all day, except to the governesses. Miss Smith has more than once punished me in that way,

and you may imagine how it increases my love for her !

Well, after this long dreary day, comes evening lecture. Oh, Vi.! if anything could make school more odious than it is, that evening lecture would be the thing ! Picture to yourself eighteen weary girls, after a day's absence from any recreation, having swallowed their tea, and then forced to sit in the school-room on hard benches, without backs, in prim silence, awaiting the arrival of the Rev. Josiah Dutton, who sometimes keeps us waiting for at least an hour. We are not allowed to speak. We are not allowed to read. We sit there in silent expectation ; which a figuratively historical pen would liken (by way of a new simile) to the senators of Rome awaiting the Gauls. We sit and look at the candles, look at the ceiling, look at the governesses, and look at each other. At last the door opens, and the reverend Dutton appears. He takes his place at a desk, and begins in a droning voice, meant to be impressive, a lecture or sermon which we do not attend to. I sit opposite to him, and am forced to keep my eyes fixed upon him, because I know Miss Smith's are fixed upon me. There I sit, my back aching from want of support, my eyes *drawing straws* in the candles, till I feel as

if I should grow blind, wearied with the un-varied occupation of the day, and still more wearied by the effort to keep up my attention to what I cannot interest myself in, what indeed, for the most part, I cannot comprehend.

There, my dear Vi., you have a return for your long letter, and an encouragement to write again. I'm literally at the end of my paper, for this is the last sheet I have in the world. Blanche is to write to you to-morrow.

P. S.—Unless you have an opportunity of getting your letter delivered by private hand, mind what you say! All ours are opened. This will be put in the post, in London, by one of my companions, who goes there for a couple of days; otherwise, I dare not have sent it.

CHAPTER III.

THE HAPPY SCHOOL-DAYS.

ROSE and Blanche remained three years at Mrs. Wirrelston's.

Rose's letter has disclosed to us a sufficiently detailed account of their school existence; but she has omitted one very important point—for the very excellent reason that, at the time she wrote, it had not shown itself. She speaks, indeed, of the surprise and contempt of the girls when they learned how scantily her purse was furnished; but the full effects of that were only developed some time afterwards.

A school is an image of the world in miniature, and represents it, perhaps, in its least amiable aspect. The child is not only father to the man, but the father, before experience has engendered tolerance, before suffering has

extended sympathy. The child is horribly selfish, because unreflectingly so. Its base instincts have not been softened or corrected. All its vices are not only unrestrained, but unconcealed. Its egotism and vanity are allowed full play.

Rose's schoolfellows were quite aware of the beauty and mental superiority which distinguished her and Blanche; and envied them for it. But they were also fully aware of the scantiness of their allowance, and the inferiority of their dress; and despised them heartily, undisguisedly. Poverty, which is an inexcusable offence in the great world, becomes a sort of crime at school. The love of tyranny implanted in the human breast, and always flourishing in children, gratified itself by subjecting Rose and Blanche to endless sarcasms on that score. The little irritations which arose, in the natural course of things, between them and their schoolfellows, were sure to instigate some sarcasm on "mean little creatures"—"vulgar things"—"penniless people," &c. It was a safe and ready source of annoyance: a weapon always at hand, adapted to the meanest capacity, and certain to wound.

Beyond the indignities which it drew down

upon them, the absence of pocket-money was a serious inconvenience. They had only two shillings a week each as an allowance; out of which they had to find their own pens, pencils, paper, india-rubber, sealing-wax, and trifles—indispensable trifles of that kind; besides having to put sixpence every fortnight into the poor-box. The hardship of this was really terrible. The word may seem a strong one, but if we measure the importance of things by the effects they produce, it will not seem too strong. To men and women, all this inconvenience may seem petty. It was not petty to the unhappy girls: it was the cause of constant humiliation and bitter sorrow.

Parents little imagine the extent of their cruelty, when, to gratify their own ambition, they send children to expensive schools, and refuse to furnish them with the means of being on a footing of equality with their school-fellows. The effects of such conditions are felt throughout the after life. The misery children endure from the taunting superiority of their companions, is only half the evil; the greater half is in the moral effects of such positions.

Upon natures less generous, healthy, and

good than those of Rose and Blanche, the evil would have been incalculable. Even upon them, it was not insignificant. It over-developed the spirit of opposition in Rose; it crushed the meek spirit of Blanche. Rose with her vivacity and elasticity could best counteract and forget it; but it sank deeply into the quiet, submissive soul of Blanche, and made her singularly unfitted to cope with the world; as the sequel of this story will show.

I do not wish to exaggerate the influence of this school experience; I am well aware of the ineradicable propensities and dispositions of human beings; but surely it is right to assume that certain dispositions are fostered or misdirected by certain powerful conditions; and no disposition could be otherwise than damaged by being subjected to distressing humiliation from companions, and on grounds over which the victim had no earthly control.

A miserable life Rose and Blanche led. Disliked by Mrs. Wirrelston and Miss Smith, because they learned no extras—that fruitful source of profit—and because they were so ill-dressed as to be “no credit to the establishment;” they were taunted by their school-fellows, because unable to join in any subscription which was set on foot. To any one who

knows the female mind, I need not expatiate on the contempt which frowned upon their shabby attire. To be ill dressed; to have none of the novelties; to continue wearing frocks out of the season, and which were outgrown; to be shivering in white muslin in the beginning of December.

Yes, reader, in December; for winter clothing they had none, and their parents were abroad.

Mrs. Vyner's neglect is perhaps excusable when we reflect how young she was, and how unfit for the position she occupied; but the effects of that neglect were very important.

"Poor things!" exclaimed Letitia Hoskins, a citizen's daughter, in all the insolence engendered by consols; "their father can't afford to clothe them."

"Yet why doesn't he send them to a cheaper school?" suggests Amelia Wingfield.

"Vulgar pride. I dare say he's some shop-keeper. He wishes his daughters to be educated with ladies."

"Meant for governesses, I shouldn't wonder."

"Most likely, poor things!"

In vain did Rose and Blanche repeatedly answer such assertions, by declaring their

father's family was one of the most ancient in England (Miss Hoskins gave an exasperating chuckle of ridicule at that), and was worth twelve thousand a year. A derisive shout was the only answer. The girls *would* not have believed it, however credible; and it was on the face of it a very incredible statement, coming from girls who, as Letty Hoskins once observed, "had the meanness to come there with a sovereign each, and one pot of bears' grease between them. Girls who were never dressed half so genteelly as her mama's maid."

"And learn no extras," added little Miss Pinkerton, with a toss of her head. "When I told Rose that I had got on so well with my drawing (especially the *shading!*) that Mr. Hibbert said I might soon begin drawing with *creoles*, she burst out laughing, and said she had never heard of that branch of the art before. Fancy a girl of nineteen never having heard of drawing with *creoles*!"

"With *crayons*, I suppose you mean," suggested Amelia Wingfield, contemptuously.

"Well, it's all the same; *she* had never heard of it."

Rose was witty enough to take fearful reprisals on those who offended her; but, although she thus avenged herself, she was

always sure to be worsted in the war of words. Nothing she could say cut so deep as the most stupid reflection on her dress or poverty. No sarcasm she could frame told like the old—but never too old—reference to governesses.

Nevertheless, her vivacity and humour in some measure softened the ill impression created by her poverty. She amused the girls so much, that they never allowed their insolence to be more than a passing thing. Often would she make the whole school merry with some exquisitely ludicrous parody of Mrs. Wirrelston or Miss Smith. The latter was her especial butt. She revelled in quizzing her. She knew well enough that the laughers, with the treachery of children, first enjoyed the joke, and then repeated it to Miss Smith, to enjoy the joker's punishment, and to curry favour with the governess. No matter; Rose knew she was sure to be betrayed, yet her daring animal spirits were constantly inciting her to make fun of her ridiculous mistress.

Miss Smith was a starch virago. Bred to the profession of governess, she had considerable acquirements—of which she was very vain—and great sense of the “responsibility” of her situation, which showed itself in a morbid watchfulness over the “morals of her young

charges." Her modesty was delicate and easily alarmed; nothing, for instance, would induce her to mention sparrows before gentlemen—those birds having rather a libertine reputation in natural history—she called them "little warblers." Again: the word *belly* was carefully erased from Goldsmith's History of England, and *stomach* substituted in the margin. Rose once pointed this out to the girl standing next to her at class, and was duly punished for her "impropriety."

Miss Smith was not handsome. Her complexion was of a bilious brown, mottled with pimples. Her nose was thin and pointed; the nostrils pinched up, as if she were always smelling her own breath, and that breath stronger but not sweeter than the rose. Her lips thin and colourless. Her figure tall and fleshless. There was a rigidity and primness in her whole appearance, which lent itself but too easily to caricature; and Rose, whose good nature would have spared a kinder person, had no remorse in ridiculing the ungenerous mistress, who visited upon her and her sister the sins of their father.

On the day selected for our glimpse into this school, Rose was shivering over a long task, which had been given her for the following

audacity. Miss Smith had been “reviling in good set terms” the character of Meredith Vyner. Rose’s blood had mounted to her cheek, but she was silent, conscious that any retort would only indulge her mistress, by showing that the abuse of her father was a sore subject. She affected to have lost her copy of Goldsmith, and to be in great concern about it. As it was only a common schoolbook, bound in mottled calf, Miss Pinkerton could not understand her anxiety about it, sarcastically adding, “*My* papa doesn’t care how many books I have. He can afford it.” “Oh, it isn’t the book,” replied Rose confidentially, “it’s the *binding!* *Real Smithskin!*”

Blanche and Miss Pinkerton both laughed ; and the latter immediately informed Miss Smith of the joke, and of Blanche’s participation. For this offence they were both punished ; but the name remained : to this day the mottled calf binding is by the girls called Smithskin.

It was near the breaking up, and the elder girls, with the horrible servility of children of both sexes when at school, had set on foot a subscription to present Mrs. Wirrelston and Miss Smith with some token of their regard. Miss Hoskins had put her name down for

thirty shillings. Others had subscribed a pound, and others ten shillings; even the younger girls had put down five shillings each. When the list was brought to Rose and Blanche, they said they had no money.

"Of course not," said Miss Hoskins; "what's the use of asking them? You will ask the servants next."

Blanche raised her mild face, and said,—

"I would subscribe if I could; but how is it possible? You girls come to school with ten pounds or more in your pockets, and you have other presents besides. Papa refuses to allow us pocket-money—says we can have no use for it."

"All that is true," added Rose; "but if we *had* money I would not subscribe. I have no regard for them, and the only token I would offer them is a copy of 'Temper,' bound in Smithskin."

"Oh!" ejaculated several, pretending to be very much shocked.

"Or 'Don Juan,'" pursued Rose, "binding ditto. I'm sure Miss Smith reads it, because it's called improper."

The girls were so much shocked at this that they moved away; but they did not dare repeat it, so fearful did it seem!

Mrs. Wirrelston entered. Anger darkened her brow, though she endeavoured to be calm and dignified. They all read what was underneath that calmness, and awaited in silence till she should speak. She held in her hand an open letter, which she passed to Miss Smith, who, having read it, looked stacher and more bilious than ever.

The letter was from Meredith Vyner to his children, and this was the postscript:—

“As you are to leave school at Christmas, mind you don’t forget to bring away with you your spoons and forks.”

It was the custom at Mrs. Wirrelston’s, as at most schools, to exact from each pupil, that she should bring her own silver spoons and fork, also her sheets and towels; a very satisfactory arrangement, which saved the school-mistress from an expense, and, as the pupils always left them behind, was the foundation of a respectable stock of plate when the mistress should retire into private life. But the enormity of a pupil taking away her own spoons and fork, had hitherto been unheard of; and the *meanness* of a parent who could remind his children of their property, appeared to Mrs. Wirrelston and Miss Smith something exceeding even what they had anticipated from

Meredith Vyner. And yet they had formed an exalted view of his capacity in that way, from the odious criticisms which he permitted himself on certain charges in the half-yearly accounts—charges which had always been admitted by the parents of other pupils, and which, if difficult to justify, no man of “common liberality” would question. This “tradesmanlike spirit” of examining accounts had greatly irritated the two ladies, and they paid off, in ill treatment to Rose and Blanche, the annoyance caused by their father’s pedantic accuracy.

The way in which this postscript was received may be readily imagined. It was the climax of a series of insults. ‘One would imagine that Mrs. Wirrelston and Miss Smith wanted to *keep* the paltry spoons—which were very light after all. As if it were the custom at that establishment to retain the young ladies’ property.’

“But be careful, young ladies,” said Mrs. Wirrelston, with great sarcasm in her tone; “be careful that the Misses Vyner leave nothing behind them. It might be awkward. We might be called upon. Everything is of some value. Be sure that the ends of their lead pencils are packed up.”

"Yes," interposed Miss Smith, "and don't forget their curl papers. The Misses Vyner will certainly like to pack up their curl papers."

Blanche, unable to endure these unjust taunts, burst into tears. But Rose, greatly incensed, said—

"All that should be said to papa, not to us; since he is to blame, if there *is* any blame."

"You are insolent. Go to your room, Miss Vyner!" exclaimed Mrs. Wirrelston.

Miss Smith lifted up her eyes in amazement at such audacity,

"I do not see," pursued the undaunted Rose, "why we are to be taunted, because papa wishes to see his own property."

"You don't see, you impudent girl!"

"No, I do not, unless our taking home our own spoons should be a ruinous *precedent*."

The sarcasm cut deeply. Both mistresses were roused to vehemence by it; and, vowing that such insolence was altogether insupportable, ordered her boxes to be packed up, and expelled her that very afternoon.

Rose was by no means affected at the expulsion; but poor Blanche, who was now left alone to bear the spite and malice of two mis-

tresses for three weeks longer, greatly felt the loss of her sister's company, the more so because the other girls, at all times distant, had now sided with their mistresses, and actually refused to associate in any way with her.

But the three weeks passed. Breaking up arrived. It is needless to say how many prizes were adjudged to Blanche Vyner at the distribution. She only thought of the joy of being once more at home.

CHAPTER IV.

ROSE AND BLANCHE AT HOME.

No doating mother could have seemed kinder to her daughters than was Mrs. Meredith Vyner to Rose and Blanche, for the first three weeks after their arrival from school. She insisted upon their each having a separate allowance; but contrived that it should be totally inadequate to the necessary expenses. She shopped with them, but recommended, in a tone which was almost an insistence, colours which neither suited their complexions, nor assorted well with each other. She made them numberless little presents, and was always saying charming things to them. If they thought her pleasant before, they now declared her quite loveable. They looked up to her, not only as one having a mother's authority, but also as a superior being, for she

had made a decided impression on them of that kind, by always condemning or ridiculing their own tastes and opinions as “girlish,” and by carefully repeating (with what amount of embroidery I will not say) all the compliments which men paid her on her own supreme taste. The latter were not few. Partly because a pretty, lively woman never is in want of them: the more so, because Mrs. Meredith Vyner not only courted admiration, but demanded it. What more natural, therefore, that two girls, hearing from their father, who was so learned, such praises of their stepmother’s talents, and observing such submission from other men to her taste, should blindly acknowledge a superiority so proclaimed?

As if to make “assurance doubly sure,” Mrs. Meredith Vyner would occasionally repeat to them, with strong disclaimers, as “unwarrantably satirical,” certain depreciatory comments which had been made to her, she said, by men, the gist of which was, that they were not admired. After a while, the poor girls actually believed they were wanting in attractions. Rose’s brilliant colour was a milkmaid’s coarseness, and Blanche’s retiring manners were owing to a want of grace and style. Rose, who was merry, was given to

understand that she was loud and vulgar. Blanche, who was all gentleness, had learned to consider herself as an uninteresting, apathetic, awkward girl.

To effect such impressions was only half a victory. The real triumph was to manage that the admiration which such beauty and such manners as theirs were sure to call forth, should not efface these impressions. This was done by a very simple, but ingenious contrivance. Mrs. Meredith Vyner never gave balls, seldom accepted invitations to them, or to any dancing fêtes. She went out a great deal, and often received company. But her society was limited to dinners and conversazioni. The men were almost exclusively scientific, or members of Parliament, or celebrities. No specimen of the genus "Dancing Young Man" was ever asked. Nothing could suit Meredith Vyner better; neither his age nor his habits accorded with balls, while literary and scientific men were always welcome guests; so that he applauded his wife's wisdom in giving up the "frivolities," and hoped his girls would gladly follow her example.

By such and similar means she had got them, as the vulgar phrase goes, "completely

under her thumb ;" and that, too, without in any instance giving the world anything to lay hold of which looked like a stepmother's unkindness. Indeed, the girls themselves, though they at last began to suspect something, could make no specific accusation. Mrs. Meredith Vyner might occasionally be said to err, but never to do anything that could be interpreted into wilful unkindness.

It may, perhaps, be wondered that considering how much it was her desire to gain the golden opinions of the world as an exemplary stepmother in a peculiarly trying situation, she did not see the simplest plan would have been real, not pretended, kindness.

But by her line of conduct she secured all she wanted—the appearances ; and she secured two objects of more importance to her. One of interest, and one of *amour propre*. The first object was the complete separation of the children from their father. Determined to have undisputed sway over her husband, she isolated him from the affection of every one else, by a calculation as cruel as it was ingenious. The second object was the complete triumph she obtained over her daughters, whose age and beauty made them dreaded rivals. If mothers cannot resist the diabolical

suggestions of envy, but must often present the sad spectacle of a jealousy of their own children, how much more keenly must the rivalry be felt with their stepdaughters, especially in England, where the unmarried women have the advantage? And the pretty little tiger-eyed Mrs. Vyner was too painfully conscious of her humpback, not to dread a comparison with the lovely Rose and Blanche.

I have to observe also, that the economical fit no longer troubled Mrs. Vyner; she had launched into the extravagances of London society, with the same thorough-going impetuosity characteristic of all her actions. No fit ever lasted long with her; this of economy had endured an incredible time, and was now put aside, never again to be mentioned.

CHAPTER V.

MARMADUKE MEETS MRS. VYNER.

EVERYBODY was at Dr. Whiston's, as the phrase goes, on one of his Saturday evenings. Dr. Whiston was a scientific man, whose great reputation was founded upon what his friends thought him capable of doing, rather than upon anything he had actually done. He was rich, and knew "everybody." His Saturday evenings formed an integral part of London society. They were an institution. No one who pretended to any acquaintance with the aristocracy of science, or with the scientific members of the aristocracy, could dispense with being invited to Dr. Whiston's. There were crowded lions of all countries, pretty women, bony women, elderly women, strong-minded women, and mathematical women; a sprinkling of noblemen, a bishop or two, many

clergymen, barristers, and endless nobodies with bald foreheads and spectacles, all very profound in one or more “ologies,” but cruelly stupid in everything else—abounding in “information,” and alarmingly dull. Dr. Whiston himself was a man of varied knowledge, great original power, and a good talker. He passed from lions to doctors, from beauties to bores, with restless equanimity: a word for each, adapted to each; and every one was pleased.

The rooms were rapidly filling. The office of announcing the visitors had become a sinecure, for the very staircase was beginning to be invaded. Through the dense crowd of rustling dresses and formidable spectacles, adventurous persons on the search for friends made feeble way; but the majority stood still gazing at the lions, or endeavouring by uneasy fitful conversation to seem interested. Groups were formed in the crowd and about the doorways, in which something like animated conversation went on.

In the centre of the third room, standing by a table on which were ranged some new inventions that occupied the attention of the bald foreheads and bony women, stood a young and striking-looking man of eight and twenty. A

melancholy listlessness overspread his swarthy face, and dimmed the fire of his large eyes. The careless grace of his attitude admirably displayed the fine proportions of his almost gigantic form, which was so striking as to triumph over the miserable angularity and meanness of our modern costume.

All the women, the instant they saw him, asked who he was. He interested everybody except the bald foreheads and the strong-minded women; but most he excited the curiosity of the girls dragged there by scientific papas or mathematical mamas. Who could he be? It was quite evident he was not an ologist. He was too gentlemanly for a lion; too fresh-looking for a student.

"My dear Mrs. Meredith Vyner, how d'ye do? Rose, my dear, you look charming; and you too, Blanche. And where's papa?"

"Talking to Professor Forbes in the first room," replied Mrs. Meredith Vyner, to her questioner: one of the inspectors of Dr. Whiston's inventions.

"I am trying to get a seat for my girls," said Mrs. Vyner peering about, as well as her diminutive form would allow in so crowded a room.

"I dare say you will find one in the next

room. Oh, come in; perhaps you can tell us who is that handsome foreigner in there; nobody knows him, and I can't get at Dr. Whiston to ask."

They all four moved into the third room, and the lady directed Mrs. Vyner's attention to the mysterious stranger.

It was Marmaduke Ashley.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner did not swoon, she did not even scream; though, I believe, both are expected of ladies under such circumstances, in novels. In real life, it is somewhat different. Mrs. Vyner only blushed deeply, and felt a throbbing at her temples—felt, as people say, as if the earth were about to sink under her—but had too much self-command to betray anything. One observing her would, of course, have noticed the change; but there happened to be no one looking at her just then, so she recovered her self-possession before her acquaintance had finished her panegyric on his beauty.

She had not seen Marmaduke since that night on which she parted from him, in a transport of grief, on the sands behind Mrs. Henley's house, when the thunder muttered in the distance, and the heavy, swelling sea threw up its sprawling lines of silvery foam,—the

night when he had hacked off a lock of his raven hair for her to treasure.

She had not seen him since that night, when the wretchedness of parting from him seemed the climax of human suffering, from which death—and only death—could bring release.

She had not seen him since she had become the wife of Meredith Vyner; and as that wife she was to meet him now.

What her thoughts would have been at that moment, had she ever really loved him, the reader may imagine; but as her love had sprung from the head, and not the heart, she felt no greater pangs at seeing him, than were suggested by the sight of one she had deceived, and whom she would deceive again, were the past to be recalled. Not that she cared for her husband; she fully appreciated the difference between him and Marmaduke; at the same time she also appreciated the differences in their fortunes, and that reconciled her.

The appearance of Marmaduke at Dr. Whiston's rather flurried than pained her. She dreaded “a scene.” She knew the awful vehemence of his temper; and although believing that in an interview she could tame the savage, and bring him submissive to her feet

yet that could only be done by the ruse and fascination of a woman; and a soirée was by no means the theatre for it.

She began to move away, having seated Rose and Blanche, trusting that her tiny person would not be detected in the crowd. But Marmaduke's height gave him command of the room. His eye was first arrested by a head of golden hair, the drooping luxuriance of which was but too well known to him: another glance, and the slightly deformed figure confirmed his suspicion. His pulses throbbed violently, his eyes and nostrils dilated, and his breathing became hard; but he had sufficient self-command not to betray himself, although his feelings, at the sight of her whom he had loved so ardently, and who had jilted him so basely, were poignant and bitter. He also moved away; not to follow her, but to hide his emotion.

Little did the company suspect what elements of a tragedy were working amidst the dull prosiness of that soirée. Amidst all the science that was gabbled, all the statistics quoted, all the small talk of the scientific scandal-mongers (perhaps the very smallest of small talk!), all the profundities that escaped from the bald foreheads and the strong-minded women, all

the listlessness and ennui of the majority, there were a few souls who, by the earnestness and the sincerity of their passions, vindicated the human race—souls belonging to human beings, and not to mere *gobemouches* and ologists. These have some interest to the novelist and his public; so while the gabble and the twaddle are in triumphant career, let us cast our eyes only in those corners of the rooms where we may find materials.

To begin with Marmaduke. What a world of emotion is in the breast of that apparently unoccupied young man, carelessly passing from room to room! What thoughts hurry across his brain: thoughts of wrong, of vengeance, of former love, and present hate! Then Mrs. Meredith Vyner, all smiles and kind words, passing from group to group, throwing in a word of criticism here, a quotation there, listening to the account of some new discovery, as if she understood it and cared about it—who could suppose that a thousand rapid plans were presenting themselves to her fertile ingenuity, and all quickly discarded as too dangerous? It was indeed a question of some moment, how was she to meet Marmaduke? Should she give him the cut direct? Should she be sentimental? Should she be haughty?

Her resolution was still unformed when Marmaduke stood before her. Accidentally as they had approached, they were both too much occupied with each other to be in the least surprised. With a sudden impulse, she held out her hand to him. He affected not to see the charming frankness of her greeting, and when she said,—

“I hope I must not recall myself to your recollection, Mr. Ashley!”

He replied with exquisite ease,—

“I know not what will be thought of my gallantry, madam, but, indeed, I must own the impeachment.”

“Then how must I be changed! To be forgotten in so short a time. Oh, you terrible man! I can never forgive you.”

“I can never forgive myself; but so it is.”

So perfectly was this epigram delivered, that those standing around could never have suspected he had said anything but a commonplace. She was deeply wounded by his manner, and he read it in her cruel eyes; but the smile never left her face, and she introduced herself as Mrs. Meredith Vyner, with playfulness, throwing his forgetfulness on the lapse of time since they had met.

“You have the more reason to forgive me,”

said Marmaduke, "as my memory is so very bad, that, under the circumstances, I should have almost forgotten my own sister."

She winced, but laughingly replied,—

" Well, well, there are many virtues in a bad memory. I suppose you forget injuries with the same Christian alacrity."

He laughed, and said,—

" Oh, no! I have not the virtues of bad memory: do not invest me with them. If I easily forget faces, I never forget injuries."

She winced again, and this time felt a vague terror at the diabolical calmness and ease with which he could envelope a terrible threat in the slight laugh of affected modesty. Confusion, even bitterness, would have been more encouraging to her. She felt that she was in the presence of an enemy, and of one as self-possessed as herself.

" Have you been long in England?"

This was to get off the perilous ground on which they stood.

" A few months only."

" And do you intend remaining?"

" Yes; I fancy so. I have one or two affairs which will keep me here an indefinite time."

" I suppose it would be proper to assume that one of those is an *affaire de cœur?*"

"Well," he replied, laughing gently, "that depends upon how the word is used."

"I must not be indiscreet, but a mutual friend of ours told me there was a lady in the case."

She said this with a peculiarly significant intonation, as if to give him to understand that jealousy had driven her into marrying Meredith Vyner. He did not understand her meaning, but saw that she meant something, and replied,—

"I confess to so much. In fact, one of the affairs I spoke about is the conclusion of a little comic drama, the commencement of which dates before I left England. Ah, Cecil! how d' ye do?"

This last sentence was addressed to Cecil Chamberlayne, an old acquaintance of Marmaduke's. During their conversation, Mrs. Meredith Vyner was enabled to pass on, and to reach the third room, where, with more agitation in her manner than the girls had ever remarked before, she summoned them to accompany her, saying that she felt too unwell to remain longer.

Blanche arose hastily, and with great sympathy inquired about the nature of her illness; to which she only received vague replies. Rose

was evidently less willing to leave. Though why she was unwilling was not at first so apparent. By a retrospective glance at another little group in Dr. Whiston's salons, we shall be able to understand this.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW ROSE BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH OUR
UGLY HERO.

ABOUT three quarters of an hour before, Rose and Blanche were seated on an ottoman, between two elderly women, ugly enough to be erudite, and repulsive enough to forbid any attempt at conversation. Silent the girls sat, occasionally interchanging a remark respecting the dress of some lady ; and as a witticism was sure to follow from Rose, which Blanche was afraid might be overheard, even this sort of conversation was sparing, though so much food was offered. Not a soul spoke to them. They knew scarcely any one, for their stepmother studiously avoided introducing them. The consequence was, that many habitual visitors at their father's knew them by sight, but had no idea who they were ; and many were the invitations in which they were not included,

simply because their existence as young ladies who were "out" was not suspected.

While they sat thus alone, it was some relief to them to espy Mrs. St. John, whom they knew slightly, and who had recently purchased the Grange, an estate adjoining Wytton Hall. She came towards them, leaning on the arm of a young man, whom she introduced as her son; and one of the erudite women rising at that moment to go, Mrs. St. John took possession of her seat, next to Blanche, leaving her son standing talking to Rose. In a very few minutes, a withered little man in large gold spectacles came up, and offering his arm to the other erudite female, carried her off, thus leaving a place, which Mr. St. John at once seized upon.

Julius St. John had not a person corresponding to the beauty of his name. Do not, my pretty reader, turn away your head; do not shrug your shoulders; do not skip the next page or so, because truth bids me inform you Julius was remarkably plain. I would have him handsome if I could. You may believe me, for I am perhaps a greater worshipper of beauty than you are; but it is, nevertheless, true, that I am now going to demand your admiration for a young man, who is undis-

guisedly, unequivocally plain. Not ugly—ugliness implies meanness, or moral deformity—yet absolutely without any feature which could redeem him from being familiarly called “a fright.” Strikingly plain is the proper expression; so striking as, perhaps, to be the next best thing to beauty, from the force of the impression created. No one ever forgot his face. No one could casually perceive it without having the gaze arrested for a moment. Let me hasten to add, that the effect was almost repulsive, it was so powerful. I add this, lest you should suppose that I am going to trifle with the truth, and to soften my description by certain intimations of an expression of such exquisite sweetness and such delicate sensibility—such ideality—or such intellectual fire illuminating his face, that to all intents and purposes, my plain hero becomes a handsome man. No, reader, no; while I am perfectly aware that some plain features are rendered handsome by the expression, I am also aware that some faces—and the faces of very noble creatures—are irredeemably plain; and such was Julius St. John’s. Judge:—

A head of enormous size was set upon the miserable shoulders of a diminutive body,

which, though not deformed, was so thin and small, that an energetic deformity would have been preferable. This head was covered with a mass of black, crisp, curly hair, which fell carelessly over a massive but irregular forehead, ornamented with two thick eyebrows, which, meeting over the nose, formed but one dark line. The eyes that looked underneath these were bright, but small. They looked through you ; but what they expressed themselves it was seldom easy to guess. The nose was insignificant ; the mobility of the nostrils alone attracted attention to it. The mouth was large—not ill-cut—but the lips full and sensual. The chin large ; firmly, boldly cut. The complexion dark and spotted.

These features were not even redeemed by the look of a gentleman, or the look of an artist. Common he did not look, nor vulgar, but striking ; and, on the whole, repulsive. The best point about him was his consciousness of his ill looks, and the freedom from any coxcombical effort to disguise it. He did not bring out his ugliness into relief by a foolish attention to dress, as most ugly men do. He was neither a dandy nor a sloven. That he was a “fright” he knew, and accepted his fate with manliness.

"Have you been looking at those?" he said to Rose, as he sank into the chair by her side, and pointed to the table on which the inventions were laid. "Perhaps you can explain them to me?"

"No, indeed, not I. I never understand anything of that sort."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously! it's very stupid, I know; but I am stupid. What I am able to understand it would, perhaps, be difficult to say; but there can be no hesitation in excluding everything like science or manufactures. They are my detestation."

"Whisper it not in Gath!" he said, with mock horror. "Only conceive where you are!"

"Very much out of place; but mama has a fancy for coming here, and we are obliged to like it."

"Well, it is a comfort for me to find some one as ignorant as myself. Everybody here is so alarmingly instructive. I find nobody ignorant of anything but their own ignorance. Even the young ladies have attended Faraday, and the Friday evenings at the Royal Institution, till —"

She held up her finger threateningly, and

said, "Now don't be severe, I am one of those young ladies: I never miss a Faraday, and am never allowed to miss a Friday evening. Oh! you need not look astonished. I sleep very comfortably there, believe me."

He laughed, and continued,—

"Then I can forgive your attendance. Science ought to be quite content with female votaries of dubious ages. I am sure if it has the *bogies*, it may leave us idlers the beauties for our comfort. I quite sympathize with you in your aversion to manufactures. They are very wonderful, doubtless; but as I am not going to set up a mill or a factory of my own, the processes are superlatively uninteresting."

"And if I may be so bold as to ask it, why do I see you *here*?"

"Upon my word, I can hardly tell. Why does one go anywhere? Mere idleness and imitation. Wherever I go, it is almost always dull, and this house is duller than most; but one occasionally meets with a recompense, as I have this evening."

"In sitting next to me, eh? I accept the compliment, though it might have been newer."

"Well, at any rate, it bears out my con-

fession of ignorance. I know not even how to turn a compliment!"

"Is not that Dr. Lindley?"

"I believe so. You are a disciple of his of course? One may know botany without being formidable."

"I am glad of that, because I am supposed to be learned in that department."

"Then you have not the claim I set up for the new degree of C. I. D."

"Pray, what is that?"

"Doctor of crass ignorance, for which my pretensions are better than yours, as I scarcely know a rose from a rhododendron."

"But I only told you I was *supposed* to be learned, not that I am so. My reputation is very simply acquired. Whenever people are puzzling their memories about some flower, I boldly call it a something *spirans*, if it is of the twirligig kind, or else a something *elegans*, or if it is bright-coloured, a something *splendens*. My name is instantly adopted, and my wisdom meets with respect. Many other reputations are no better founded. Impudence may always reckon on the ignorance of an audience.

He laughed at this, and then said—

“ Am I to presume you know something of Latin, then ? ”

“ About as much as of botany. Papa, you know, is a great scholar, and has tried to teach us all Latin, though with mediocre success. But mind, it is a secret that I know even the little I do. Think of the injury it would do me. Who would waltz with a girl who was known to understand Latin ? ”

“ True, true. Men don’t like it. They are proud of their wives or lovers speaking all the continental languages, but a tinge of Latin is pronounced too *blue*. The secret of this male outcry is this : all men are supposed to understand Latin, and very few do ; accordingly they resent any attempt to invade their prescriptive superiority. I remember my noble friend Leopardi used to say that only in a woman’s mouth could the true beauty of Latin be properly recognised.”

“ Do you know Leopardi, then ? ”

“ I did know him, poor fellow ; but he has been dead these two years. He was a grand creature. Have you read his poems ? I have never before met with any English who had heard of him.”

“ Read them, no. He is too difficult.”

“ Difficult ? ”

"Why, we girls, as you are perhaps aware, are taught to distinguish *sospiri* from *ardiri*, and *lagrime* from *affanni*, after which we sing Bellini, and are said to know Italian. But when a poet a little more difficult than Metastasio is placed into our hands, we are at a stand-still."

In this way they chatted merrily enough. Julius was eloquent in his praise of Leopardi, from whom he went to Dante, to Byron, to Bulwer, Scott, and Miss Austen. Rose was delighted to find so many tastes and opinions shared in common with this pleasant young man, and could have sat all night talking to him. She had forgotten his ugliness in the charm of his conversation; but he had not forgotten her beauty, which was shown to greater advantage by the liveliness of her manner.

It was a delicious *tête-à-tête*. One of those accidental enjoyments which from time to time redeem the monotony of soirées, and for the chance of which one consents to be bored through a whole season. Not *what* was said, but *how* it was said, made the talk so delightful. The charm of sympathy, the comfort of finding yourself, as it were, mirrored in the soul of another, the easy unaffected

flow of words dictated by no wish to shine, but simply suggested by the feeling, made Rose and Julius as intimate in that brief period, as if they had known each other many months.

Cannot Rose's unwillingness to leave now be appreciated? Cannot the reader understand her impatience at having such a *tête-à-tête* disturbed? But there was no help for it. She was forced to say adieu, and she held out her hand to him with a frankness which almost compensated him for the pain of seeing her depart. He went home and dreamt all night of her.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner, followed by her daughters, sought her husband, who was listening to a humorous narrative given him by Cecil Chamberlayne, of the elopement of the wife of a distinguished professor, with an officer almost young enough to be her son. Meredith Vyner laughed mildly, brushing the grains of snuff from his waistcoat with the back of his hand, and observed :—

“ Egad! I always suspected it would end in that way. Such an ill-assorted match! Well, well, as Horace says, you know,

“ Felices ter et amplius
Quos . . . ”

Here he was interrupted by the appearance of his wife, who, hurriedly intimating that she felt the rooms too hot, desired him to take her home.

"Directly, my dear, directly," he said, and then turned to Cecil, to finish his quotation.

"Quos irrupta tenet copula, nec malis
Divulsus querimoniis
Suprema citius solvet amor die."

"Good-evening. . . . Now, my dear," offering his arm to his wife, "I am at your service."

"*He* talks of ill-assorted marriages!" said Cecil Chamberlayne to himself, as they left the room.

The ride home was performed in silence. Meredith Vyner was trying to recollect a passage in Horace, which would have enabled him to make a felicitous pun on something Professor Forbes had said to him, and his forgetfulness of which hadteazed him all the evening. His wife was meditating on the words, looks, and manner of her jilted lover, astonished at his calmness, and alarmed at his threats. The calmness of vehement men is always more terrible than their rage; and the vagueness of Marmaduke's threat made it

more formidable, because it suggested a thousand things, and intimated none. What *would* he do? What *could* he do?"

Rose was thinking of Julius St. John, and her charming *tête-à-tête*. Blanche was weary and sleepy.

Marmaduke, as he jumped into his cab, and drove to the club, reproached himself for having been led away by his anger so far as to threaten. He had put her on her guard, and thereby rendered his vengeance more difficult. It was, indeed, a proof of the violence of his agitation, that he should have so far forgotten himself; and he determined, if possible, to recover that false step.

Marmaduke Ashley was one of those

"Children of the sun whose blood is fire,"

and looked upon the treachery of his mistress with very different feelings from those of a calmer-blooded northern. His transports of rage and anguish when he heard of her infidelity almost killed him, and they only settled down into a fierce lust for vengeance. His father dying bequeathed to him a small fortune, which, instead of endeavouring to increase, he brought with him to England, and there awaited, with all the patience of an

Indian, the hour when he should be able to wreak full vengeance on her who had humbled his pride, shattered his illusions, and lacerated his heart.

He had formed no plan. Time would, he doubted not, bring forth some opportunity, and for that he waited; enjoying himself, meanwhile, as a young man about town, with time on his hands and money in his pocket, best can enjoy himself. He was no moody Zanga, with one fixed idea. He did not go scowling through society like the villain of a tragedy, solacing himself with saturnine monologues, and talking of nothing, thinking of nothing, but of his wrongs and his revenge. Such monomaniacs may exist, but they are rare, and he was not of them. His heart swelled, and his temples throbbed, whenever he thought of his hated mistress, and the thirst for vengeance was not slaked by thinking of it. But this dark spot was only a spot in his life, other thoughts occupied him, other interests attracted him, throwing this quite into the background.

CHAPTER VII.

ROSE VYNER WRITES TO FANNY WORSLEY.

"OH! about gaieties, I assure you I have little to tell. We go to very few parties. Mama says dancing is so frivolous: though I observe she dances all the evening when we do by chance go to a ball. Papa sides with her, and says *he* cannot conceive what pleasure people take in it. Perhaps not; but *we* can! However, we dare not complain, and mama is so kind to us that, on the whole, we get on very well, though I long to be in the country. Last Saturday week, we were invited to Dr. Whiston's; a wise place where every one looks like an oracle, where there are few young men, and those generally sickly, fewer nice men, and scarcely any one Blanche and I know to speak to. Mama likes these sort of places. She is so clever, and manages to talk

with all the oracles upon their separate sciences, though she never opens a scientific book from one month to another; but somehow she can dispense with knowledge, and yet contrive that people should believe her deeply-read. But then she is so strange! I must interrupt my narrative to tell you something which I can't make out in her. She gets more admiration, in spite of her deformity, than we could ever pretend to; and her style of beauty seems to be exactly what men delight in.

"How she manages to persuade us, I don't know, but the result is, we never look well when we go out to a party. This, and our not being overwise, prevents our finding much enjoyment at Dr. Whiston's; so we went on that memorable evening prepared for a yawn. Mama quickly got us seats, and then sailed about the room talking to her friends. This she does invariably. It is called chaperoning. Though *what* protection young girls need at such places, and how *this* can be considered as protection, are two things I have not yet comprehended. Well, I seem as if I were never coming to the point, eh? And yet all this preparation is to usher in no adorably handsome young man with bushy whiskers and sleepy eyes, like him we used to see at church

when we were at Mrs. Wirrelston's, and when you persuaded me I was in love with that little humpbacked lawyer, in nankeens, who used to ogle us so (do you remember?)—but, on the contrary, to tell you my evening was rendered perfectly delightful by a certain Julius St. John, who sat by my side and chatted away so pleasantly, that my evening fled as rapidly as Cinderella's. And it was his conversation—nothing else; for I declare he was unreasonably hideous . . .

“I am almost ashamed of that last line. Why should I say he was hideous? He wasn't. He was *adorably ugly*. I never cared for beauty, as you know, or you would not have persuaded me into a little sentiment for my nankeened humpback; and it is very foolish in us all to make such a fuss about it: the plainest men are certainly the most agreeable! But, however, it is no use preaching to you on this subject; you who refuse to dance with every man whom you don't think good-looking!

“Enough for you to know that my dear, little, ugly man was unaffectedly chatty, and very clever; and that our conversation was so pleasant, I was quite impatient for yesterday, the second Saturday for which we were invited

to Dr. Whiston's, — expecting to see him there and to renew our tête-à-tête. I had arranged all sorts of topics. In my mind's eye, I prefigured his animated pleasure at espying me, and then his coming up and securing a seat, and chatting more charmingly than before. Some of my replies were so clever that they astonished me. How brilliantly I *did* talk! How many little scenes of this kind were rehearsed in my imagination, I leave you to guess, if you have ever been impatient for any meeting. They were delicious; but they made the reality only more cruel.

“Conceive my disappointment: he was there, yet never came to sit beside me! When first he saw me, his welcome was so warm that it was the realization of what I had expected; but he suffered us to pass on into the last room without once thinking of accompanying us. I was mortified, I confess. I expected to find him as anxious to renew our tête-à-tête as myself, and began to be ashamed of having thought so much of him, when it was clear he had not bestowed a thought on me.

“We sat in our sullen seats, and looked on in no very amiable mood; that is, I was cross; Blanche, dear creature, had nothing to ruffle her sweet equanimity. It then occurred to me

that he would assuredly soon find us out ; but he did not. I sat there in vain. The people never before seemed so dull and stupid. The rooms never were so hot. I longed for mama to fetch us away.

“ At last he did condescend to approach us and ask us some trivial questions, which irritated me so much that I hardly deigned to answer him. He did not seem in the least surprised by my behaviour ; and that made me angrier. It was quite a relief to me when he turned round to speak to some one and went away.

“ I don’t understand it at all. I suppose I have been making a little fool of myself ; yet, in spite of his rudeness—no, not rudeness, but —what shall I call it ?—I should like to see him again. His mother has purchased the Grange, so when we are at Wyton, we shall perhaps see a good deal of him, and I shall then be able to understand him.”

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. Langley Turner, AND HER FRIENDS.

WHILE Rose was writing the foregoing letter, Mr. and Mrs. Meredith Vyner were driving towards Eaton-square, on a visit to the well-known and well-worth-knowing lively widow, Mrs. Langley Turner.

London society abounds in subjects curious to the observer; and, in spite of its general uniformity, is so split up into opposite and opposing sections, that a painter of manners, whose observation had been confined to a few of those sections, would be accused of ignorance or of caricature by nine-tenths of the English public. This is the reason of the numerous failures in the attempt to describe English society, both by natives and foreigners. To foreigners, indeed, the task must be hopeless. How should they avoid taking their standard

of the whole from the circle in which they move? They see the interior of houses where wealth, talent, political influence, and sounding names meet together in habitual and familiar intercourse: how can they imagine that what they see there are not the acknowledged manners of the “upper classes?” Yet nothing can be more erroneous. Portland-place differs as much from Belgravia, as Regent-street does from Bond-street. What a world is that of Belgravia, and what a variety of worlds within it! Things are there done, and accepted as matters of course, which would make the rest of England incredulously stare; and we may safely affirm that any sketch of English society taken from the pleasant circles of Belgravia, would seem quite as preposterous as any Frenchman’s “impressions” of England taken from Leicester-square.

These few remarks were necessary to prevent the reader’s indignant rejection of the description of Mrs. Langley Turner as a caricature,—as opposed to the whole constitution of English society. And we beg him therefore, if he have not travelled so far as Pimlico, to retire into his ignorance, and, while staring as much as he pleases, to believe it.

Mrs. Langley Turner’s set was one of the

small orbs within the greater sphere of Belgravia, and her house was one of the gayest, if not the most exemplary, in it. Her Sunday evenings were celebrated. Her picnics, her breakfasts, her snug dinners, and multitudinous parties, were each and all agreeable enough ; but the Sunday evening was her *cheval de bataille*—therein she distanced all competitors.

There was something piquant in the audacity of the thing in puritanical England, where, unlike all other Protestant countries, the Sunday is a day on which all amusement, except plethoric dinners, is supposed to be a sin ; and, in 1839, such a thing was more unusual than it has since become. This saucy defiance thrown in the face of Puritanism, was joyfully accepted by all those whose residence abroad had made it familiar, as well as by those whose opinions were in favour of a less rigid adherence to a code which other Protestant nations repugned. And though many women went to Mrs. Langley Turner's Sunday evenings, and enjoyed them greatly, yet very few had the courage to imitate her.

Never were pleasanter parties than hers. The rooms were always crowded with pretty women and *somebodies*. Foreigners abounded ; literary men and artists of celebrity, Italian

singers, travellers, diners out, guardsmen, wits, and roués, formed the heterogeneous and amusing society. People with "slurs" upon their reputation were to be met there; and they were not the least amusing of the set. I know not whether it is that the women whose virtue is not absolutely intact, and the men whose conduct is of the same easy class, are really more amusing and better natured than the incorruptibly virtuous and the sternly conscientious; or that public envy more readily pounces upon any slips made by the clever, amusing, good-natured people; but the social fact is indisputable, that the pleasantest companions are not always the most "respectable."

Mrs. Langley Turner had a sneaking regard for those black sheep; and Cecil Chamberlayne once laughingly declared, that she never took any notice of a person until his or her reputation had been damaged. "In her paradise," he said, "all the angels will be fallen angels."

With all due allowance for the exaggeration here, certain it is that the truth of the *bon-mot* gave it its success. Everybody said it was *so good!*" And she did not disown it.

"I like people for themselves," she would

say ; “ and, as their virtue does not affect me, so long as I like them and see nothing dis-honourable in them, I will open my doors to them.”

This un-Britannic audacity of thinking for herself, without reference to the opinion of Mrs. Grundy, and of actually “ receiving” women about whom scandal had been busy, very naturally gave scandal a sort of licence with her ; but it never rose above whispers. Mrs. Langley Turner herself was a prodigious favourite with all classes of men. The wits liked her, she was so lively ; the guardsmen, she was “ so larky ;” the talkers, she was so chatty ; the authors, she was so clever, without ink on her thumb, and knew so much of the world ; and everybody, because she was so quiet and good-natured. A genuine woman ; frank, hearty, gossipy, flirty, kind, forgiving —in a word, loveable.

It was to her house that the Vyners were driving, Sunday afternoon being a sort of levée with her. When the Vyners arrived the little drawing-room was tolerably full. First on the sofa, by Mrs. Langley Turner, sat a dowager-countess with her young, handsome, and uninteresting daughter. Opposite them, in an easy chair, sat the broken, gouty, but still

charming Sir Frederick Winter ; a name celebrated in the annals of gallantry, and one of the now almost extinct species of *roués*, in whom exquisite manner and courtly elegance made vice the very chivalry of vice, so that, in losing all its grossness, it did really seem to lose half its deformity. By his side sat Cecil Chamberlayne, and next to him the pedantic and bony Miss Harridale and her mother ; the former seemed to have absorbed the dregs of her ancient family for several generations, so cruelly vulgar was every look and movement. She was talking atrocious French to a bearded dandy, whom Cecil called “some *very* foreign count ;” occasionally entrapping young Lord Boodle into the conversation by an appeal to his judgment, which, after smoothing his blonde moustache with the ivory handle of his riding-cane, he reluctantly drawled out.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner, in her very affectionate and sprightly greeting of Mrs. Langley Turner, had time to perceive that Marmaduke, for whom she came, was not there. It was her first appearance in Eaton-square on a Sunday, for Mrs. Meredith Vyner never missed afternoon service, and nothing but the hope of seeing Marmaduke, whom she was told

was a constant visitor, would have induced her to break in thus upon her habits. She comforted herself with the expectation that he might still come.

"Mr. Chamberlayne," said Mrs. Langley Turner, when they were seated, "is giving us an enthusiastic account of a new tragic actress, whom, he says, the Duchesnois, the Dorval, and the Mars—three single ladies rolled into one—would not equal."

"Who is that?" said Mrs. Meredith Vyner, restlessly turning upon Cecil.

"A little Jewess they call Rachel, quite a girl, picked up from the streets, but an empress on the stage. Till I had seen her, I did not believe the human voice capable, in mere speech, of expressing such unutterable sadness, such sobs of woe."

"And you have seen Edmund Kean?"

"Yes, Edmund Kean; but Rachel is something quite incomparable."

"That is true," said the very foreign count; "her acting is not acting."

"No," replied Cecil, "it is *suffering*."

The bony Miss Harridale nodded approval of the epigram, and then informed the company that for her part she saw nothing in French tragedy.

“Surely,” said Cecil, “Racine is an exquisite writer.”

“No,” replied the confident young lady, “he has no *ideas*.”

There was something so vague yet so crushing in this dictum, which was delivered with amazing *aplomb*, that no one replied for a few seconds.

“I fancy,” said Sir Frederick Winter, “we are scarcely inclined to do justice to French tragedy, because we always compare it with that which it least resembles—our own.”

“For my part, I never *presume* to have an opinion on so delicate a subject,” said Mrs. Vyner, who hated Miss Harridale, and never lost an opportunity of saying something disagreeable; “because I feel we English do not understand the language sufficiently to judge of that which depends upon the grace and beauty of language. I do not, of course, mean to imply Miss Harridale in that observation—she is *such* a Frenchwoman !”

Miss Harridale looked daggers, and said, “I do not pretend to feel the graces of Racine, about which they talk so much. I dare say they are all very well. I only speak of the substance: he has no ideas; and what is a

poet without profound ideas? I am for ideas above everything."

"But how Racine understood the heart—especially woman's heart!" said the count. "What insight into the passions! what tenderness! what subtlety! what sublimity!"

"I never saw them," dogmatically pronounced Miss Harridale.

"Then Corneille," added the count; "le grand Corneille, there is a genius! Has he not painted Romans?"

"Not to my apprehension," said Cecil. "His Romans are Gascons. The old Horace, for example, who is so much admired, seems to me to have more rhodomontade than grandeur. He is not a man, but a figment!"

Miss Harridale smiled her approbation of this, and declared that the celebrated *qu'il mourût* was not an "idea."

The count failing to understand that profound objection, asked if she did not regard the *qu'il mourût* as sublime?

"Not at all."

"Well, I suppose I am a heretic," said Meredith Vyner; "but to speak the honest truth, French sublimity always seems to me to fall very wide of the mark."

"Surely, not *very*," said Cecil; "only a *step*."

A general laugh greeted this sally, which made Mrs. Vyner remark Cecil, whom she now remembered as the young man Marmaduke spoke to at Dr. Whiston's. She resolved to invite him.

"Is this Rachel—I think you call her—handsome?" asked Lord Boodle, tapping his lips with his cane.

"Yes, and no—the beauty of mind."

"The only beauty worthy of the name," said Miss Harridale, sententiously.

It was the only style of beauty to which she could lay claim.

"She is beautiful enough," continued Cecil, "for the parts she plays—you never feel any contradiction between the poet's idea and her representation of it. You should see her in *Phèdre*. I think I never can forget the desolation in her utterance of the four grand opening lines; or the fine horror of her 'C'est Vénus tout entière à sa proie attachée;' which by the way," he added, turning to Vyner, "is only a magnificent paraphrase of what your favourite Horace says in his ode to *Glycera*—

"In me tota ruens Venus
Cyprum deseruit."

Meredith Vyner, who had a high opinion of any man who could quote Horace appositely, suspended a pinch of snuff which he had for some minutes been heaping up between his thumb and forefinger, to assure Cecil that he was perfectly correct in his conjecture, and as no commentator had noticed it, he should certainly do so in his forthcoming edition—"the work of twenty years' labour, sir!" Vyner added, clenching the observation with a sonorous pinch.

In a few seconds, Cecil and Vyner were engaged together upon the nullity of commentators in general, and those on Horace in particular. Talk of contempt! there is no scorn like the scorn of one commentator for another.

Vyner wound up a tirade against Burmann, Dacier, Sanadon, and Bentley, by saying, "If you will do me the pleasure of calling, Mr. Chamberlayne, I will show you my edition, together with some of my marginal corrections. Bentley boasted that he had made eight hundred corrections of the text,—sir, I have made more than a thousand in Bentley's edition. You shall see it: it will delight you."

Cecil thought that few things would delight

him less, but he was glad to have an invitation to the Vyners upon any pretext.

During this talk, Miss Harridale was harassing Lord Boodle with her criticisms on modern English literature, which she found deplorably deficient in "ideas."

Mrs. Vyner was paying great court to the old roué, Sir Frederick—his opinion being a verdict.

A knock at the door made her heart beat a little faster. To her disappointment, however, it was only Julius St. John's name she heard announced. She shortly overheard Julius informing Mrs. Langley Turner, that he had left Mr. Ashley stretched on his sofa, devouring *Ruy Blas*, just received.

"And I am to be neglected for Victor Hugo, I presume!" said Mrs. Langley Turner.

Julius shrugged his shoulders significantly.

"I shall scold him well for it."

"Not when you hear his excuse. He told me that no attraction could drag him from *Ruy Blas* till he had finished it; it was such a splendid tale of vengeance."

A cold shiver ran over Mrs. Meredith Vyner, as she heard St. John carelessly and laughingly let fall those words full of terrible significance to her.

"But he will be here this evening, I hope?" inquired Mrs. Langley Turner.

"Yes."

Finding it was useless waiting any longer, Mrs. Vyner rose to withdraw.

"Do come round this evening, dear," said Mrs. Langley Turner; "only a few friends, and Pellegrini is to give us some recitations from Alfieri—will you?"

"With pleasure."

"That's a dear little woman, I'm so glad."

Meredith Vyner handed Cecil his card, and repeated how glad he should be to show him all his notes on Horace.

"A very clever fellow, that young Mr. Chamberlayne," said Meredith to his wife, as they got into their carriage, "with remarkably sound ideas on the subject of commentators."

"Charming person—so witty. I am glad you gave him your card. By the way, I have said we would go to Mrs. Turner's this evening, to hear Pellegrini recite from Alfieri."

"Very well, my dear," said the astonished Vyner, not venturing to make any further remark on so singular a communication.

It was indeed enough to make him silent. It was something so enormous, so unexpected,

that it sounded like a mystification. She had always pretended to be very strict on religious subjects; without affecting fanaticism, she was as rigid as was compatible with her being a woman of the world. This relaxation from her usual rigidity, therefore, was the more surprising, because it seemed motiveless.

Her husband at last thought that the temptation was Pellegrini's recitations. He knew she was a great student of poetry, which she always declared he knew very little about, and had the naïveté to believe, that to hear poetry well recited would be as great a temptation to her, as a new edition of Horace would be to him.

Her motive really was an anxiety to come to an "explanation" with Marmaduke, whose threats terrified her the longer she thought of them. She wished at least to know his game, if she could not look over his cards; and as the sooner she knew that the better for her own defence, she was restless till she had seen him.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO PORTRAITS.

“Look on this picture, and on that.”

SHAKSPEARE.

IT was no small gratification to Mrs. Meredith Vyner, as, leaning on the arm of her ponderous husband, she glided into Mrs. Langley Turner's rooms that evening, to distinguish amongst the first group that met her eye, Marmaduke Ashley, resting against the doorway of the second salon, talking to Cecil Chamberlayne and Julius St. John. He was, indeed, a figure not to escape even an indifferent eye. There was lion-like grace about him; a certain indefinable something in his attitudes and movements, which, in their oriental *laisser aller*, were in sharp contrast to the stiffness and artificiality of even the least awkward of our northern dandies. When our young men are careless, they

have a slouching, sprawling manner, which is more offensive to the eye than stiffness. It is only the children of warmer climates who can afford to let their limbs fall naturally, and be graceful. Marmaduke, whose prodigious chest and back betokened the strength of a bull, seemed to have united with it the agility of a deer, and was the very model of manly grace.

He was well dressed, without overdress ; but he had committed one error in taste, which might, perhaps, be set down to coxcombry, in wearing a white waistcoat, somewhat larger than the fashion permitted. His chest was so expansive, and he was so tall, that this vast expanse of staring white, while it fixed all eyes upon him, made them remark how much too large the chest was for symmetry. It was *trop voyant*, to adopt the jargon of the French dandies. The effect was further increased by his wearing a white cravat, which at that time had only just began to replace the black, introduced by that puffy potentate, so wittily characterized by Douglas Jerrold as the “most finished gent. in Europe.”

How many women sighed for him on that evening, I cannot tell ; but certain it is, that a shadow of regret fell on Mary’s heart as she remarked the beauty of her former lover, and

silently compared him with her heavy, snuffy husband. Nor did he gaze on her unmoved. She was a striking figure, and would have been so even in an assembly of beauties. Perhaps the most striking part about her was her neck and bosom, with the whiteness and firmness of marble,—with its coldness too ; beautiful it was, and yet repulsive ; hard, cold, immodest, unvoluptuous ; no blood seemed to beat in its delicate, blue veins—no heart seemed to move its rise and fall ; this, the most womanly beauty of a woman, was in her unwomanly ; it arrested the eye, without charming it. There was something about her whole appearance which was singularly fantastic : her golden hair, drooping in ringlets to her waist, and her dazzling skin and tiny figure gave her the appearance of a little fairy ; nor did her deformity destroy this impression. She was so pretty, or rather so *piquante*, and unlike other women, that her crooked shoulder only gave a piquancy the more by the sort of compassionate feeling it raised. “What a pity such a sweet creature should be deformed!” was the universal exclamation ; and this very exclamation made people think more of the charms which redeemed that deformity.

In truth, the great deformity was not in the

back—it never is—but in the eyes and mouth. Theoretically, we may all declaim against faults of proportion and of outline, but, practically, it is the eyes and mouth that carry the day: according as they look and they smile, do we feel that people are beautiful or ugly; because in them lies the expression of the heart and soul. This I take to be the secret of those astounding differences in taste upon a subject of which there is a distinct standard—beauty. True, there is a standard of form and colour. We are all agreed upon the face that would make the handsomest picture; but the best part of beauty is that which the painter can never express, because he is condemned to one expression; and the beauty of the loving heart and noble soul is visible in the changing lustre of a thousand smiles and glances. Now, although we might all agree that a certain face has exquisite purity of outline, and gratifies the æsthetical sense of proportion, yet we should feel and say that some less perfect face has charmed us more. Why?—because we are indifferent to perfection? No: but because in some less harmoniously proportioned face, we have read a more loveable soul—a soul with which we can better enter into communion. Thus it is that men get distractedly

enamoured of women, whose beauty is more than problematical, because without having had many opportunities of knowing their characters, but mostly from what the faces express, they read there the signs of unalterable goodness and lovingness, of high nobility of soul, or, perhaps, only of some voluptuous and passionate tendencies ; and all these are qualities more fascinating than purity of outline. In support of my argument, let me mention the fact, that the women most celebrated as beauties have seldom, if ever, been picture-beauties. It is impossible from any picture of Mary Queen of Scots, for example, to imagine wherein lay the enchantment of her beauty.

Therefore, my ill-favoured reader, take courage ; if your mind is honest, and your heart loving, you will have true beauty—yes, the positive effect of beauty on all those who can read the signs of honesty and loveliness.

These signs were not legible in the eyes and mouth of Mrs. Meredith Vyner ; and there, as I said, lay her real deformity, though people did not call it so. Those light, grey eyes, so destitute of voluptuousness, but so full of light —so cunning, so cruel, so uncomfortable to look upon ; and that small mouth, with its thin, irritable, selfish lips, which a perpetual

smile endeavoured to make amiable, created a far more repulsive impression, when first you saw her, than any hump could have created : and yet she fancied that her hump was her only deformity.

She was, as I said, repulsive at first sight ; but most people got over that impression after a while, as they generally do when familiarity has blunted their perceptions. It was not necessary to be a great physiognomist to see at once the nature of the soul her eyes expressed ; and yet, when people heard her amiable sentiments, and noticed the meekness of her manner, they yielded to the popular sophism of its being “unjust to judge from first impressions,” and they believed in her *professions* rather than in her *expressions*—that is, in her calculated utterances rather than her instinctive and unconquerable emotions.

“ But,” objects the reader, “ first impressions are so often false, that it would be madness to rely on them.” I answer : first impressions—at least those of a broad and simple kind—are rarely, if ever, false ; though often *incomplete*. The observer should not rely on them ; but he should never absolutely reject them. They may be modified—greatly modified—but not contradicted. Human character is marvellously

complex, and this very complexity serves to confound the observer, if he have not a clue ; and that clue is best attained on a first interview, because then the perceptions are least biassed by the opinions. If he understand human nature, he will soon be able to modify his first impressions, and complete the general outline of a character.

Physiognomy is very fallacious, I know, in its details ; but in its broad principles, which almost all human beings instinctively employ, there is no more infallible guide. The mistake physiognomists commit, is in not leaving sufficient margin for education. A man may have cruelty or bad temper very legible in his face, and yet not in his acts be cruel or bad-tempered ; but if you interrogate his boyhood, you will find that, however he may have subdued the demon within him, he once had the quality which his face expresses, and, in the depths of his nature, he has it still : the wild beast lies chained within him, but may at any time break loose.

If physiognomy betrays us into rash judgments, far more erroneous are those into which we are betrayed by an observation of conduct or of speech, if we have not previously a clue to the character ; because it is a tendency in

us all to attribute importance only to important acts—only to great occasions, when as we say, a man's true nature is called forth. Nothing can be more false. Trifles are the things by which men are to be judged. If we would know them *as they are*, we should observe them in their unguarded moments, in the routine of daily and familiar life, when no man's eyes, as it were, are on them. If we would know them *as they wish to be considered*, then we may observe them when the importance of the occasion turns men's eyes upon them. Taking the most liberal view of the question, one can only say that great occasions show what men are capable of in extraordinary circumstances, not what the men are.

I am tempted to quote the remarkable words of a remarkable writer on this very point: "In our judgment of men," says Henry Taylor, "we are to beware of giving any importance to occasional acts. By acts of occasional virtue weak men endeavour to redeem themselves in their own estimation, vain men endeavour to exalt themselves in that of mankind. It may be observed, that there are no men more worthless and selfish, in the general tenor of their lives, than some who from time to time perform feats of generosity. Sentimental selfishness will

commonly vary its indulgences in this way, and vain-glorious selfishness will break out into acts of munificence. But self-government and self-denial are not to be relied on for any real strength, except in so far as they are found to be exercised in detail.”*

The first impression Mrs. Meredith Vyner made, was that of a cold, cunning, cruel woman; with plenty of nervous energy and sensibility, but no affection. If you disregarded that, and attended only to her conduct, and to the sentiments she generally expressed, you thought her an enthusiastic, affectionate, child-like creature, whose very faults sprang from an excess of warmth and impulsiveness; and so good an actress was she, that it required a keen observer, or a long intimacy with her, to detect her real character.

It has been remarked that deformed people are singularly noble, delicate, and generous in their natures; or singularly mean, cunning, and malicious. The scorn of the world so powerfully influences them, that it brings out into greater relief the features of that moral physiognomy with which nature has endowed them, making them much better or much worse than their fellows. Mrs. Meredith Vyner be-

* “The Statesman.”

longed to the latter class; but so cunning was she, that most people were entirely deceived by her; and if they were occasionally startled by some great contradiction, they got over it with the usual remark, "Oh, she is such a very strange woman!"

CHAPTER X.

DECLARATION OF WAR.

MRS. MEREDITH VYNER had not long been in the room before she had spoken to Marmaduke, who, perfectly on his guard, replied with respectful politeness to the observations she from time to time addressed to him. It was impossible for the acutest observer to have suspected there was any *arrière pensée* in her slightly flurried manner (she was always restless), or in his dignified ease. Two gladiators in the arena never faced each other with greater watchfulness, than this tiny, lively woman—confident in her skill—and this self-possessed magnificent Brazilian.

Pellegrini placed himself with his back to the fire and coughed as he thrust one hand into his breast, previously to beginning his recita-

tions. The guests crowded from the other rooms, and disposed themselves to listen, as if they were to understand and greatly relish Alfieri. Mrs. Vyner, taking advantage of this movement, beckoned Mar-maduke to follow her, and seating herself at a small table in the inner room, began turning over the leaves of the Keepsake, and then addressing him in an under tone, said :—

“So you wanted to cut me the other night?”

“I did. Surely it was the best thing I could do.” As he said this, he sat down on an ottoman opposite her.

“What! before any explanation?” she inquired, endeavouring to throw a tenderness into her tone, which she could not throw into her eyes.

“All explanation is useless when the facts are so eloquent. I neither ask for explanation, nor would I accept one.”

“And you think me ———” She could not proceed.

“A woman,” he said, gravely.

“And what motives do you attribute?”

“Very natural and powerful motives, or they would not have influenced you. I know

not what they were. I do not desire to know.
Either you love me ——”

“ Mr. Ashley, remember I am a married woman, and this language ——”

“ I was only putting an hypothetical case : your conduct and the present interruption convince me it was unnecessary to put such a case.”

He rose, but she motioned to him to be reseated. She sighed, and continued hurriedly turning over the leaves of the book she held. Expecting every moment that she was going to speak, he watched her in silence. This was exactly what she wished ; confident in the influence of her beauty over him, she thought it more effective than any argument ; besides, it did not inculpate her in any way.

She miscalculated. The contemplation only served to irritate him the more. If his temples throbbed at the mere recollection of her having jilted him, the sight of her called up bygone scenes of tenderness, which made her inconstancy the more odious.

“ Do you not hate me ? ” she said at last, keeping her eyes fixed on the book, not daring to look at him.

"I do," he replied, in a whisper, like the hiss of a serpent.

She started at the sound, and raised her terrified head to see if his face contradicted or confirmed the words. But she could read nothing there. The light which for a moment had flashed from his dark eyes had passed away, like the flush which had burnt his cheek. He had been unable to repress that movement of anger; but no sooner were the words escaped than he repented them, and endeavoured to do away with their effect, by adding,—

"That is, I *did*; now hate has given place to contempt. When I hated you, it was because I still felt a lingering of that love which you had outraged; but I soon overcame that weakness, and now I think only of you as one who *sold herself for money*."

At this very bitter speech, made the more galling from the tone of superb contempt in which it was uttered, she shook back her golden ringlets, and bent on him her tiger eyes with an expression which would have made most men tremble, but which to Marmaduke had a savage fascination, stirring strange feelings within him, and making him almost clutch her in a fierce embrace. She looked

perfectly lovely in his eyes at that moment ; and it is impossible to say what might have been the result of this scene, had not her husband appeared. He had just missed her, and astonished at not finding her listening to Pellegrini's recitations, for which alone he supposed her to have come there, he began fidgeting about, till he espied her in earnest conversation with the handsome Marmaduke.

“ My dear,” said he, preparing a pinch with slow dignity, “ won’t you come into the next room, to hear Alfieri ? ”

“ No ; I came away, unable to listen to Pellegrini’s affected declamation.”

Meredith Vyner stood there somewhat puzzled what to say. He flattered his nose with a series of gentle taps, and in his abstraction, let fall more of the snuff than usual. Not even his pinch, however, could clear his ideas. He felt something like jealousy, though the handsome young man was a perfect stranger to him ; and wished to get his wife away, without exactly knowing how it was to be done.

He was relieved from his perplexity by an influx of the company from the other room at

the conclusion of the recitation. The tête-à-tête was broken up. Mrs. Vyner took her husband's arm, and moved away, not without a parting smile at Marmaduke, who received it with supreme indifference.

CHAPTER XI.

ONE OF OUR HEROES.

ON the following morning, Cecil Chamberlayne was busy over his edition of Horace, “cramming” for his interview with Meredith Vyner, whose acquaintance he was the more anxious to cultivate, now he knew that he had three marriageable daughters.

Cecil has been introduced once or twice before, but I have not yet had an opportunity of sketching his portrait, so let me attempt it now.

He was a social favourite. He had considerable vivacity, which sometimes amounted to wit, and always passed for it. He drew well, composed well, sang well, dressed well, rode well, wrote charming verses and agreeable prose, played the piano and the guitar, and waltzed to perfection : in a word, was a *cavalier accompli*.

But with all these accomplishments there was no genius. He could do many things well, but nothing like a master. He painted better than an amateur, but not well enough for a professed artist.

Indeed, there was in him, both physically and morally, a sort of faltering greatness which arrested the attention of the observer. The head and bust were those of a large man, but the body and legs were small and neatly made. In his face there was the same contradiction: a boldness of outline, with a delicacy amounting to weakness in the details. His brow was broad and high, without being massive. His eyes were blue and gentle. His nose aquiline, and handsomely cut. The mouth would have been pretty had it not been too small. In appearance he was somewhat over neat—dapper.

At school, the boys called him “Fanny.”

It is not often that the physical corresponds so well with the moral, as in Cecil Chamberlayne; but in him the accordance was perfect. You could not look at his white hand without at once divining, from its conical fingers, and the absence of strongly marked knuckles, that it belonged to one in whom the emotions predominated, and in whom the intellect tended

naturally to art; it was, in truth, an artistic hand, the largeness of which showed a love of details, as the broad palm and small thumb showed an energetic sensuality and a wavering will.

Lively, good-natured, and accomplished, he was a great favourite with most people, and, indeed, the very attractiveness of his manners had been the obstacle to his advancement in life. His time and talents, instead of being devoted to any honourable or useful pursuit, were frittered away in the endless nothings which society demanded, and he had reached the age of seven and twenty, without fortune and without a profession. He flattered himself that he should be made consul somewhere, by one among his powerful friends, or that some sinecure would fall in his way; and on this hope he refrained from applying himself to the study of any profession, and only thought of sustaining his reputation as an amusing fellow. Meanwhile his small patrimony had dwindled down to the interest of four thousand pounds, which was preserved only because he could not touch the capital: a misfortune which he had frequently declaimed against, and to which he now owed the means of keeping a decent coat on his back.

He went to Vyner, listened to his remarks on Horace, sympathized with his hatred of editors, wondered at the beauty and rarity of his editions, expressed strong and lively interest in his commentary, and, in short, so ingratiated himself with the old pedant, that he was invited down to Wytton Hall, whither the family was about to go.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

CECIL CHAMBERLAYNE TO FRANK FORRESTER.

MY DEAR FRANK,

I AM alone in the house ; everybody is gone somewhere, except that prosy, respectable gentleman, Captain Heath, who is in the library, reading Seneca or Hannah More, I dare say ; and in consequence of this solitude I obey the call of friendship, and devote my unoccupied time to you.

I have been here three days without a yawn. That is enough to tell you how different the place is from what I expected. On the other hand, I must confide to you my suspicions, that I shall return to town perfectly heart-whole. There are only the two elder girls at home ; and, though very pretty, they are not

at all my style. Rose, the eldest, is satirical, and far too lively to get up any sentiment with. She makes the place ring with her merry, musical laugh ; but I never get on with laughing women. Her sister Blanche is better ; but she is shy, and, I suspect, stupid. Violet, the youngest, is expected home in a few days ; but both her father and stepmother give fearful accounts of her temper ; and, without making any positive charge, Mrs. Vyner has, from time to time, said things which convey a very unfavourable impression of the girl's disposition.

As this is the case, I must look at Wytton Hall from a totally different point of view. It is now only a country house to me, and I must criticize its attractions accordingly.

My first impression was anything but favourable. I arrived here about half-past six, and was received by—the butler ! He showed me to my room in silence, and I did not feel disposed to question him. As he asked me whether I wanted anything, I inquired after the dinner-hour.

“ Dinner will be ready, sir, as soon as you are dressed,” he replied, and left me.

The house seemed very quiet, but I dressed myself with care, all the time speculating on

the cause of my singular reception, or rather, nonreception. By the time I was ready, I had made up my mind that everybody must have been dressing for dinner on my arrival, and that perhaps I had been keeping them waiting half an hour.

I rang, and the servant lighted me down a complicated course of corridors and oak staircases; very sombre, very rococo, but very superb. The wind shook mysterious tapes-tries. Banners drooped by the side of complete sets of steel armour, looking like prodigiously uncomfortable knights, stiff as steel and the middle ages could make them. Formidable griffins of finely-carved oak glared at me, with heraldic fury, from the balustrades; and endless ancestors, of unheard-of bravery and incorruptibility, looked stiffly at me from their dim canvass; each and all haughtily eyeing me, as if my intrusion on the scene was one of the inexplicable facts of modern progress. In short, I could have fancied myself in a *Castle of Otranto* some centuries ago, instead of in a gentleman's country house, in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and forty. And I assure you, as the solemn flunkey strode before me, his candle throwing but a dubious light amidst all this sombre splendour, I felt

quite romantic, and should not have started if, in some gusty movement, the tapestry had opened, and one of the faded-visaged ferocious ancestors had stepped from his frame.

At length I reached the dining-room : there the silent butler condescended to explain to me that the family and visitors were all out at a pic-nic. I was to dine by myself. And never did I sit down to a stranger or more uncomfortable dinner. You know the dinner hour is the period at which I shine ; my best stories are inspired by the cheerful scene, the lights, the clatter of glasses, and the sparkle of the champagne. It is then I feel myself possessed of all my faculties. Well, then, fancy me seated at a solitary silent meal, without even the advantages of solitude and silence. The vast saloon, with its carved oak-panels, its high and vaulted roof, its heavy antique furniture, required all its three chandeliers to be properly lighted ; instead of which, a massive candelabra threw light just on the table and its immediate neighbourhood, but left the greater part of the room in deep obscurity. In this Rembrandtish picture, which I could have painted with greater gusto had it not disagreeably affected me, you are to fancy me in the light silently eating, and in the sur-

rounding shadows two silent flunkies, silently bringing and taking away the various dishes which represented dinner; as if dining consisted solely in eating.

You often laugh at me, Frank, for my gourmandize—and you, too, such a perfect gourmand—but if you had seen me on that occasion, you would have credited my fundamental maxim, which Brillat Savarin has omitted in his *Physiologie du Gout*, viz., What the *chef de cuisine* is to the raw materials, that is the company to the *chef de cuisine*.

I never ate less, nor with such profound contempt for the process of eating, reduced to the mere satisfaction of hunger. Besides, the sombreness and silence of the scene oppressed me.

I was shown into the drawing-room; a handsome, well lighted, comfortable-looking place, which quite cheered me. A log was blazing joyously in the fire-place, for the autumnal nights down here are keen; and, altogether, the contrast with the dark, grandiose, majestically-uncomfortable dining-room, made this drawing-room delightful.

I threw myself on an ottoman, and tried to amuse myself with a book; but you know, I dare say, how impossible it is to read in such

uncertain moments. Expecting the family to arrive every minute, it was in vain I tried to fix my interest in anything I read.

I threw down the book, and gazed thoughtfully at the crackling log. The wind sighed mournfully without, the clock on the mantelpiece ticked with a sort of lively monotony, the embers fell with a cozy familiar sound, and I sank into one of those exquisite reveries wherein the past is curiously enwoven with the future, and, treading the imaginary stage, we play such brilliant parts.

I must have passed from these waking dreams into dreams of a less coherent kind, and have fallen asleep, for I was aroused by the barking of a dog, and noise of considerable bustle in the hall, which was quickly followed by the entrance of Meredith Vyner, his wife, his daughters, and his guests. He apologized for being absent on my arrival, but had accepted the engagement before my note reached him to say I should be down on that day. His welcome was warm enough ; but the others seemed to me disagreeably cold and constrained. They were all very tired, and went early to bed, except Vyner, who sat up with me discussing Horace ; and Captain Heath, who was reading the paper.

I retired to bed somewhat disgusted, and resolved to receive a letter which should call me up to town on urgent business; I felt so lonely in that great house full of uncongenial people. Sleeping in a strange house is always rather unpleasant to me. I am bothered by unfamiliarity in familiar things. I could sleep in a wigwam comfortably enough; but in a bedroom which is substantially the same as all other bedrooms, and which, nevertheless, wears an air of strangeness, I feel out of my *assiette ordinaire*. This was peculiarly so on the night I speak of, from my unpleasant impression of the people I was thrown among.

It happened, however, that my impression of the people was similar to my impression of the place—at first repulsive, afterwards attractive. What the well-lighted drawing-room was to the dining-room, that was the next morning's hilarity to the over night's frigidity. Breakfast was charming. Everybody seemed in high spirits—the first freshness of morning—and my opinion was completely changed. You know how intimate one becomes after having spent a night under the same roof: it seems as if you breakfasted only with old friends. I felt myself at home; and kept the table in a roar of laughter. This success

operated favourably on my own spirits ; and in consequence, I have established myself as a general favourite.

Now for my companions, Vyner himself promises to be more of a bore than I anticipated. His wife is very charming, and seems to agree wonderfully in all my views, which I, of course, regard as a sign of excellent taste and judgment. The daughters I have already spoken of. Captain Heath is handsome, gentlemanly, but confoundedly "sensible," and, though a guardsman, has no idea of "life." I can't say I like him ; though *why*, I don't know ; as Martial says,

Non amo te Sabidi : nec possum dicere quare;
Hoc tantum possum dicere : Non amo te.

(I hope you remember enough Latin to understand that, eh, Frank ? The truth is, I charmed Vyner yesterday with it, by quoting it as the original of "I do not love thee, Dr. Fell," which he quoted to me. He was so pleased, that I would wager he introduces it into his commentary on Horace, which already amounts to nearly three octavos !)

To return to Heath, I think something of my dislike may be the mere re-action against the immense liking, I almost said veneration, which every one feels for him here. They

are always telling some story of his goodness.
“Goodness!” and in a guardsman! •

Mrs. Langley Turner, who arrived yesterday, Sir Harry Johnstone, and Tom Wincot, I need not describe to you. But there is a young fellow named Lufton who ought to be under your hands ; he would be an admirable fellow if “formed.” To convey to you his stupendous innocence, he told me yesterday at billiards, when I asked him what was his usual stake, that “he had never played for money.” Is not this something fabulous—a myth ? Let me add, however, that he had enough *savoir vivre*, to propose that I should name the stakes, as he was quite willing to do what I did. That re-established him in my opinion. He won a pony from me, which I am not likely to regain, as he plays decidedly better than I do.

I must also not forget George Maxwell, a saturnine, stupid, fanatical individual, in love with Mrs. Vyner, or I am vastly mistaken, savagely jealous of every one she notices, but by no means rewarded by any notice from her. I can’t tell whether she observes his passion ; but she certainly does not return it. Nobody likes *him*.

There are, besides, a merry little widow, a

Mrs. Broughton, and her niece, an inoffensive girl with a happy simpering visage, radiant with foolishness.

This is our party: rather mixed, but very agreeable. I can't tell you now how we pass our time, for here am I at the end of my paper and patience.

Good-bye, Frank,

Ever yours,

CECIL.

CHAPTER II.

ROSE TO FANNY WORSLEY.

News, my dearest Fanny—news is an article as rare with us as with the morning papers. We see nobody, hear nothing, do nothing, but amuse ourselves as we best can, and that is not adapted to a letter, it would require such endless explanations.

In answer to your first question, Yes ; Julius is here, or rather, he is with his mother at the Grange, and very frequently walks over. As to his being my slave, don't think it ! He is evidently not indifferent to me, but as evidently not in love. The vainest of our sex (are we so vain ?) in my place could not imagine him in love. I'm rather glad of it, for I certainly *don't* love *him*, and should be sorry to lose a *friend*.

But let me tell you of another new acquain-

tance in the *jeune premier* line,—a Mr. Cecil Chamberlayne, whom papa has invited here for a week. He is handsome, witty, good-natured, and clever—all very excellent qualities; but there is a levity about him which somewhat disturbs my liking for him. I could never fancy myself sentimental with him for a moment. His gaiety makes me laugh, but does not, somehow, make me gay. Everybody sides against me here, except Captain Heath, who says he feels as I do in that respect. They all swear by Mr. Chamberlayne; but, to my taste, Julius St. John's gaiety is far more exhilarating, perhaps because it is tempered with a manly seriousness; you feel that his laugh is as *hearty* (in the real primitive sense of the word) as his earnestness is sincere.

Violet is to be home at the end of this week. Papa has written for her, as mama says that she is only being spoiled at my uncle's. The real secret is, I believe, that mama has heard how Violet speaks of her down in Worcestershire, and that the character there given of her comes up to London. Now, though Violet is, I believe, unjust to mama, yet people are only too willing, as mama says, to believe everything ill of a stepmother. I fear Violet won't be comfortable. Suppose Julius St. John should

fall in love with her? It would be a capital match. They would suit so well: I should like it above all things.

I am reading Leopardi's poems; they are very beautiful, and very mournful. Julius St. John says that they are the finest productions of modern Italy. By the way, though you will accuse me of filling my letter with Julius, I must tell you of something that occurred *à propos* of Leopardi:—the first evening I met him—it was at Dr. Whiston's, and I wrote you a long account of it—he spoke to me of Leopardi, whom I had not heard so highly praised before. Papa had brought a copy with him from Italy, and I had looked into it from curiosity, but finding it difficult to read, my Italian being somewhat flimsy, I took no further trouble with it, till Julius spoke so enthusiastically about him. I then set doggedly to work, and mastered the poems; having done so, I read them over again with great pleasure, and am now a sworn admirer of this strange unhappy being.

Well, one evening, shortly after we had come down here, Julius took up my copy of Leopardi, which happened to be lying on the table. It was pencilled all over. He asked whose marks those were. I told him mine.

"You seem to have been a careful reader," he said. "Your praises," I replied, "taught me to be."

He looked up for a moment, to read in one full, rapid gaze, the expression of my countenance, and then dropped his eyes once more upon the book, but not before I had noticed that his cheek was flushed. Whether in anger or in pleasure I know not, for his eyes are so shadowed by his dark, straight eyebrows, which meet across the nose, that it is only in certain aspects you can read what is passing in them. What there could be in my reply either to anger or to please him, I cannot guess ; but he changed the subject, and I could not interrogate him, as mama came up at that moment, nor have I dared since. All I can say is, that if he was angry he had quite forgotten it; and if he was pleased he is perfectly ungrateful.

This little incident is all I have to relate. Imagine what our life must be when that is an incident; and yet, as Julius says, "it is not events but emotions which make life important; and events are only prized inasmuch as they excite emotions.

Your affectionate friend,

ROSE VYNER.

P.S.—Now, don't you *misinterpret* a fact which strikes me in reading this letter over, namely, that one name occurs very frequently. It is purely owing to the want of any subject to write about. Don't imagine it otherwise.

CHAPTER III.

CECIL IS SMITTEN.

MY DEAR FRANK.

YOUR complaint respecting the omissions of my letter was not very generous, considering the length of the aforesaid letter. However, I will now tell you what I didn't tell you then—that there is endless fishing and famous preserves; so you may cultivate Vyner with perfect safety, though excuse me if I doubt your success.

The hall is, as I told you, formidably rococo, or rather *moyen age*; but handsome of the kind, and spacious. The Italian terrace in front of the house has the trim beauty of such things, but is spoiled by a want of "keeping;" the balustrades are *griffinesque*, and yet there are copies of the Greek statues in the garden!

A rich embowering shrubbery leads you

down to the river, which brawls through the property; beyond, on the other side, there is a lovely wood, which skirts the banks of the river, and affords a most romantic promenade. I should have certainly been most poetically touched the first day I went there, had it not been for the saucy merriment of that liveliest of girls, Rose ; but she drove all seriousness out of me. I could have kissed her ruddy lips to close them, and put a stop to her merciless merriment. I have since visited the wood alone, but one cannot be sentimental alone—at least I cannot. The river runs through rich meadows, on which the sleek cattle browse in philosophic calmness : it forms an endless source of amusement. I have sat for hours in the boat gently dropping down the stream, lulled by the soft ripple, and yielding myself to dreamy listlessness. The broad leaves of the water-lily that float upon the stream supporting the delicate-shaped yellow flower, and the rich colours of the luxuriant loosestrife and other wild flowers, whose names I know not, together with the windings of the river, and its undulating meadows on one side, and many-tinted wood on the other, make up a picture of which I cannot tire.

But the charms of this place are nothing to

those of one of its inmates, about whom I will now endeavour to convey my impressions. If they are somewhat confused, attribute it to the effect of an apparition, which has left me very little command over my ideas.

I told you that the youngest daughter was expected to arrive. I had consented to prolong my stay another week, and was not sorry to have an opportunity of judging for myself. It happened that one morning before breakfast I was looking over the paper, waiting, with that intolerance which only hungry men can appreciate, till the others should descend; when in bounded a magnificent Scotch deer-hound, who sprang over the chairs and sofas, in a riotous manner, and came up to me, thrusting his shaggy head in my hand to be caressed.

“Down, Shot, down!” exclaimed a sweetly imperative voice.

I looked up, and surely never did mortal eyes behold a more bewitching apparition. A young girl of more than ordinary height, dressed in a blue riding-habit, which set off the budding beauty of a graceful figure, stood before me. She wore a black straw hat, whose broad brim sheltered her face from the sun, and which, with a simple blue ribband, made a head-dress ten times more picturesque and becoming

than the odious man's hat which amazons put on ; from under it escaped ringlets of dark brown hair, tipped with a golden hue. Her brow was low, but broad—perhaps too massive for beauty. Her eyes large, long, almond-shaped, and inconceivably lustrous—the sort of eye which *looks you down*, which, even if you meet its gaze in passing, seems to project such indomitable will and energy, that involuntarily you avert your glance. I am not easily stared out of countenance, and am rather apt to look *into* women's eyes, but I find myself unable to withstand Violet's gaze—for you must have already divined that my apparition was Violet Vyner. Do not, however, suppose that because all eyes droop beneath the intolerable lustre of her glance, that she is otherwise than bewitching. Her eyes are not fierce ; though doubtless they could be. It is the astonishing energy and imperious will which look out at you, and make you feel your inferiority. And this effect is heightened by a certain impetuous haughtiness of demeanour which I never observed before. Haughtiness generally implies coldness, reserve, restraint. But in Violet, although the haughtiness is unmistakeable, the fire and passion are still more so. With the airs and carriage of the

most imperial of her sex, she unites an appearance of *abandon*, of impetuosity, of lofty passion, which belongs more to the southern women than to any I have before seen in England. To complete my feeble sketch, let me add that her nose is a trifle too large and aquiline, her mouth also too large, though handsomely cut, her complexion of that luminous brown which Titian so well knew how to paint, and the form of her face a perfect oval. Handsomer women may be seen every day in the park, or at the opera; but a woman with more character in her face—a woman more irresistibly fascinating, I never saw. Critically, there are many defects; but, taken in the *ensemble*, they only seem to heighten the one effect of a queenly beauty, half sad, half voluptuous.

I rose as she entered, but was so absorbed by her beauty that I stood gaping at her like a cockney at a covey of partridges, suddenly whirring up before him.

She bowed quietly, I thought haughtily, and did not even pay me the compliment of a little embarrassment. I recovered from my surprise, and ventured on a commonplace about the weather. She had already been out for a morning scamper; and we soon got upon

the subject of horses and hunting, which she understood a great deal better than I did. Her attention was, however, soon diverted to her dog.

"Down, Shot; down, sir! Do you hear me? Down!" she said.

The hound was at this moment resting his front paws on the table, and taking an inquiring survey of the books and flowers on it. Disregarding the command of his mistress, he continued to twitch his nose interrogatively, till a smart cut from the riding whip she held in her hand, made him spring away with a howl; and then, obedient to a gesture of command, he came and crouched at her feet.

This little incident disagreeably affected me. I am rather tender-hearted, and particularly fond of dogs; so that to see one beaten by anybody is extremely unpleasant to me, but by a woman, a young and lovely woman, it is odious. Besides, I thought the punishment needlessly severe. She seemed quite unconscious of having done anything out of the way, and continued a lively conversation with me on dogs and animals in general, all the time caressing Shot, who remained at her side; and in this conversation displaying a love

for animals, which rendered her recent act of severity more wanton in my eyes.

I have since found out that she is anything but cruel ; but upon the principle of spare the rod and spoil the dog, she exacts implicit obedience. It gives her as much pain to correct her animals as it does a mother to punish her children ; but like a courageous mother, she knows it is to save them from more pain and sorrow, and, therefore, unhesitatingly punishes them.

To tell you that I am fast falling over head and ears in love with this adorable creature, will be only to tell you what my description must have betrayed. To tell you that she seems no less inclined to follow my example will be more like news. We generally ride together ; we sing duets, and our voices harmonize charmingly ; in a word, young Lufton has begun to joke me about her.

Unfortunately my visit draws to a close, and unless I can make a tolerably deep impression before I leave, she will have forgotten me by next season. She is only sixteen ; but to look at her you would say she was twenty ; and to talk to her you would say, much more. She is one of the precocious, and has been bred up

in a queer way. Adieu ! We shall meet at the club next week.

P. S.—I open this to tell you that they will not part with me here, and that I have promised to remain till the shooting begins, though I told them I had no longer any pleasure in shooting. But I was too happy for any excuse to remain under the same roof with the enchanting Violet.

CHAPTER IV.

CECIL EXHIBITS HIMSELF.

THE three letters, just given, will save me a great deal of explanation and description ; and, as the horses are at the door, we have no time to waste.

Mrs. Langley Turner, Sir Harry Johnstone, young Lufton, Cecil, and Violet are preparing to ride out, and afterwards to lunch at the Grange.

Cecil rode remarkably well, and was proud of it ; besides, he looked handsomer on horseback, as then his head and bust were seen to full advantage, of which he was also aware ; and Violet, who had of late been accustomed to follow the hounds, and spend the greater part of every day on horseback, looked upon him with fresh admiration, as she marked the graceful mastery of his bearing. With a more

than womanly contempt for effeminate men, she had at first imagined Cecil one, from the delicacy and dapperness she noticed in him. But finding that he was an excellent shot with the rifle, that he even excelled her with pistols, that he fenced well, and rode boldly, she gave him her esteem,—and was nearly giving him her heart; but that was not gone as yet. She was charmed with Cecil's manner —she admired him, and saw his admiration for her; but she loved him not as yet, however fast she might be galloping on the road to it.

Off they started, Shot barking and leaping up at the nose of his playfellow, Violet's bay mare, Jessy, while a sedater hound trotted slowly behind. Mrs. Langley Turner, Sir Harry, and Lufton rode abreast, discussing the proposition which had just been started, of getting up private theatricals at the hall. Violet and Cecil followed, talking of favourite books and favourite composers, comparing sentiments, and looking into each other's handsome faces, suffused with the bright flush of excitement.

“Here we are at the Grange,” said Violet, as they cantered within sight of the lodge gates.

“Alas, yes!” replied Cecil.

He sighed at the thought of his delicious *tête-à-tête* being broken up; and, though he consoled himself with the idea that, since he was to remain at the hall, many other opportunities must occur, yet he knew by experience that there is no such thing as the repetition of a scene in which emotion plays the principal part. You cannot command such things. They spring out of the moment. They are dependent upon a thousand circumstances, over which you have no control. The mood of mind, the state of the atmosphere, the accident of association, all concur in investing some ordinary occasion with a magic charm, which may never be felt again. "I was a fool not to have declared myself. She would certainly have accepted me," he said to himself, as he dismounted, and passed into the drawing-room, where he found Mrs. St. John, Julius, the clergyman's wife, and Marmaduke Ashley, who had just come down on a visit at the Grange. Maxwell, with Mr. and Mrs. Meredith Vyner arrived shortly afterwards, and the whole party sat down to a merry luncheon.

"I'm delighted to learn that you are going to prolong your stay down here, Mr. Chamberlayne," said Julius St. John; "and hope you will not confine your shooting to Wyton.

The Grange, they tell me, is famous for its game."

" You are very kind," replied Cecil; " but I shall scarcely avail myself of your offer. I am no sportsman."

Violet, turning suddenly round upon him, with a look of incredulity, said,—

" No sportsman?—and such an excellent shot!"

" Don't confess it before her," said Vyner, laughing; " or you will be lost in her estimation. She is a true descendant of Diana; and, like her mythic ancestress,—

Sævis inimica Virgo
Belluis"

" I'm grieved, indeed!" replied Cecil; " but treat me as a cockney; shower contempt upon me for the confession; but, the truth is, I never found much pleasure in any sport, except hunting; and the little pleasure I used to find in shooting was destroyed five years ago."

" How was that?"

" The anecdote is almost childish, but I am not such a child as to be ashamed of relating it. I was one day rambling over the wood at Rushfield Park, with my rifle in my hand tired of shooting at a mark. There started a hare at a tempting distance from me, I fired.

A slight appearance of ruffled fur alone told me that he was hit. He ran leisurely away, and described a circle round me, till approaching within a few paces he lay meekly down, and died. I know not wherefore, but the death of this hare was indescribably touching to me. It was not the mere death: I had killed hundreds before, and often had to despatch by a blow those only wounded. But this one had died so meekly, without a cry, without a struggle, and had come to die so piteously at the feet of him who had shot it, that I took a sudden disgust to the sport, and have never fired a gun since at either hare or partridge."

There was a slight pause. The emotion of the speaker communicated itself to the audience, and Mrs. Meredith Vyner, with tears in her eyes, declared, that for her part she so well understood what his feelings must have been, that she must have hated him (*hated* was said with the prettiest accent in the world), if he had not relinquished shooting on the spot.

Violet would have said the same, but her mother having volunteered the observation, closed her mouth. She really felt what her mother only spoke; but the intuitive knowledge of her mother's insincerity—the thorough appreciation of the tear which so sentimentally

sparkled on that mother's eyelid—made her dread lest any expression of her own sentiments should be confounded with such affection, and she was silent.

Cecil was hurt at her silence. The more so as she did not even look at him, but kept her eyes fixed upon her plate.

Meredith Vyner, who had been vainly beating his brains for a pat quotation, now gave up the attempt and said,—

“But then, my dear, *you* have so much sensibility! Why, I vow if the story hasn't brought tears into her eyes—

Humor et in genas
Furtim labitur.

Certainly, there never was a more tender-hearted creature—nor one shrinking so much from the infliction of even the smallest pain.”

Vyner, as he finished his sentence, turned aside his head to fill his nose with a pinch of snuff adequate to the occasion—as if it was only in some vociferous demonstration of the kind that he could supply eloquence capable of properly setting forth his wife's sensibility.

At the mention of her tender-heartedness, both Marmaduke and Violet, involuntarily looked at her, and as they withdrew their eyes, their gaze met. No words can translate

the language which passed in that gaze: it was but a second in duration, and yet in that second each soul was laid bare to the eyes of each. The ironical smile which had stolen over their eyes changed, like the glancing hues on a dove's neck, from irony to surprise, from surprise to mutual assent, from assent to superb contempt. Marmaduke and Violet had never met before, yet in that one glance each said to the other, "So, you know this woman! You appreciate her sincerity! You know what a cruel hypocrite she is!"

Mrs. Vyner did not observe that look. She had felt Marmaduke's eyes were upon her, and affecting not to know it, threw an extra expression of sensibility into her face.

When Cecil fairly caught a sight of Violet's face, he saw on it the last faint traces of that contempt which she had expressed for her mother, but which he attributed to her un feminine delight in field-sports, and her contempt for his sensibility.

He was glad when luncheon was concluded, and the party rose to ramble about the grounds. As they were walking through the garden, he managed to bring up the subject, and frankly asked her if she did not feel something like disdain at his chicken-heartedness.

"Disdain!" she exclaimed, "how could you imagine it? Knowing you to be so little effeminate that it could not spring but from a kind and affectionate nature, I assure you I look upon it as the very best feather you have stuck in your cap—at least in my presence. I have only contempt for the *affectation* of sensibility."

"It was what your father said —"

"My poor father understands me about as little as he understands mama. Less he could not. Fond as I am of hunting and everything like exercise in the open air, I have seen too much of the mere Nimrods not to value them at their just ratio. Good in the field: detestable everywhere else."

"I'm delighted to hear you say it."

"I must confess to prizes *manliness* so high, that I prefer even brutality to cowardice. There is nothing to me so contemptible in a man or woman as moral weakness, and therefore I prefer even the outrages of strength to the questionable virtues of a weak, yielding, coddling mind."

"What do you mean by the questionable virtues of such a mind?" he asked.

"They are questionable, because not stable: the ground from which they spring being treacherous. A man who is weak will yield

to good arguments ; but he will also yield to bad arguments ; and he will, moreover, yield against his conviction. A man who is timid will be cruel out of his very timidity, for there is nothing so cruel as cowardice."

By this time they had left the garden, and joined the others, who had disposed themselves in groups, which permitted their *tête-à-tête* to continue. Meredith Vyner, Mrs. St. John, and the clergyman's wife were in advance. Mrs. Langley Turner and young Lufton followed, conning over London acquaintance and London gossip. Marmaduke, Sir Harry, and Mrs. Vyner were very lively, talking on an infinite variety of topics—Mrs. Vyner making herself excessively engaging to Marmaduke, whom she had not seen since that Sunday night when his last words had been so contemptuous, his look so strange and voluptuous. She did not doubt that the great motive of his visit at the Grange was to put his threat of vengeance in execution ; and determined either to soften him, or to learn his plans, the better to combat them.

George Maxwell walked behind them, scowling.

Julius remained in doors ; so Violet and Cecil had only to lag a little behind, to enjoy

a perfect *tête-à-tête*. Shot walked gravely at their heels.

The ramble about the grounds lasted all the afternoon. There only occurred one incident worth relating, as bearing upon the fortunes of two of the actors.

Cecil and Violet, in stopping to pick many flowers, had been left so far behind the others, that they determined to take a shorter cut to the house through a meadow lying alongside of the shrubbery. They had not gone many steps across the meadow before a bull seemed to resent their intrusion. He began tearing up the ground, and tossing about his head in anger.

"I don't like the look of that animal," said Cecil. "Let us return."

She only laughed, and said:—

"Return! No, no. He won't interfere with us. Besides, when you live in the country you must take your choice, either never to enter a field where there are cattle, or never to turn aside from your path, should the field be full of bulls. I made my choice long ago."

This was said with a sort of mock heroic air, which quite set Cecil's misgivings aside. He thought she must certainly be perfectly

aware the bull was harmless, or she would not have spoken in that tone ; and above all, would not have so completely disregarded what seemed to him rather formidable demonstrations on the part of the animal. They continued, therefore, to walk leisurely along the meadow, the bull bellowing at them, and following at a little distance. He was evidently lashing himself into the stupid rage peculiar to his kind, and Shot showed considerable alarm.

- “ For God’s sake, Miss Vyner ! let us away from this,” said Cecil, agitated.

“ He doesn’t like Shot’s appearance here,” she calmly replied, as the dog slunk through the iron hurdles which fenced off the shrubbery.

She turned round to watch the bull, and her heart beat as she saw him close his dull fierce eye—the certain sign that he was about to make a rush.

Cecil saw it too, and placing his hand upon the iron hurdle, vaulted on the other side, obeying the rapid suggestion of danger as quickly as it was suggested.

No sooner was his own safety accomplished, than almost in the same instant that his feet touched the ground, the defenceless position of Violet rushed horribly across his mind.

"Good God!" he said to himself; "what have I done? How can I ever explain this?"

He vaulted back again to rush to her succour; but he was too late. His hesitation had not lasted two seconds, but they were two irrevocable seconds; during which Violet, partly out of bravado and contempt for the cowardice of her lover, and partly out of that virile energy and promptitude which on all occasions made her front the danger and subdue it, sprang forwards at the animal about to rush, and with her riding-whip cut him sharply twice across the nose. Startled by this attack, and stinging with acute pain—the nose being his most sensitive part—the brute ran off bellowing, tail in air.

He had already relinquished the fight when Cecil came up. The coincidence was cruel. He felt it so. Violet, pale and trembling, passed her hand across her brow, but turning from Cecil, called to her dog.

"Shot! Shot! come here, you foolish fellow. He won't hurt you."

This speech was crushing. Cecil felt that he had slunk away from danger like the dog, and that Violet's words were levelled at him. Never was man placed in a more humiliating

position. To have left a young girl to shift for herself on such an occasion, and to see her vanquish the enemy in his presence ; to appear before a brave girl as a despicable coward, and to feel that he could not by any means explain his action, except to make himself more odious ; for if he were not himself too terrified to face the danger, what utter selfishness would it appear for him to have so secured his own safety !

Cecil felt the difficulty of his position, and that chained his tongue. Violet, who was suffering morally as well as physically, was also unable to speak. The shock given to her frame by the recent peril was in itself considerable ; and she trembled now it was past, almost as much as another would have trembled at the moment. But, perhaps, the moral shock was as great. She had begun to consider Cecil in the light of a lover, and was almost in love with him herself. What she had just witnessed turned all her feelings against him. Deep and bitter scorn uprooted all her previous regard, and she was angry with herself for having ever thought of him kindly.

They joined the rest of the party, without uttering a word. "My dear Violet," exclaimed

Mrs. Vyner, "how pale you look! Has anything happened? Are you ill?"

Cecil's temples throbbed fearfully. He expected to hear himself exposed before them all, and was trying to muster courage to endure either their scorn, or Violet's sarcastic irony in her description. She only said,—

"Oh, nothing; only a little fright. There was a bull in the meadow who took offence at Shot, and began to threaten us. It is very foolish to be so agitated; but I can't help it."

"Very natural, too, my dear," said Mrs. St. John. "Come and let me give you a glass of wine: that will restore you."

"No, thank you," she replied; "it's not worth making a fuss about. It will go off in a minute or two. Well, Mrs. Langley Turner, have you settled anything about the theatricals?"

"*Settled* nothing, my dear, but projected an immense deal. Let us lay our heads together a little."

Mrs. Langley Turner twined her arm round Violet's waist, and moved away with her.

Cecil was intent upon the structure of a dahlia.

Nothing more was said on the subject of the fright; and amidst his poignant sense of shame, there was a feeling of grateful reverence to Violet for having spared him. He knew her well enough to be certain that, as she had not revealed his conduct then, she would not whisper it in private. He knew her capable of crushing him in her scorn by some epigram, such as she had uttered in the meadow, but incapable of a spiteful inuendo, or sarcastic narration, in private.

Nevertheless, *she* knew it. How could he again face her? How could he dwell under the same roof with her? He would not. He would set off on the morrow. He would invent some pretext; anything, so that he had not to encounter the scorn of those haughty features.

The ride home was a painful contrast to the setting out; at least for the two lovers. The rest were as gay and chatty as before; the horses pranced, and shook their heads; Shot leaped up at Jessy's nose, and the sedater hound trotted calmly behind. The ring of laughter, the clatter of hoofs, and the barking of Shot, only made Cecil more conscious of the change. He rode on in sullen silence. Violet had taken her mother's place in the

carriage, not feeling quite recovered : her mother mounted Jessy.

It would fill a volume to tell all that passed in the minds of Violet and Cecil during that ride. Her thoughts were all thoughts of unutterable scorn ; his thoughts were of overwhelming humiliation. There was an oppressive, moody, suffocating sense of remorse and rage weighing down his spirits. He cursed himself for that unreflecting action as deeply, perhaps more deeply, than if he had murdered a man. In his impotent rage, he asked himself how it was that he had so utterly forgotten her to think solely of himself ; and cursed his ill fortune that had placed the fence so close to him. Had it been only half a dozen paces removed, he should have thought of her before reaching it, and then he could have been spared this galling shame.

Violet tried to find excuses for him, but could not. As he rode past, rapt in gloomy thought, crest-fallen, shame-stricken, she wondered that she had ever thought him handsome. The scales had fallen from her eyes.

Who has not experienced some such revulsion of feeling ? Who has not looked with astonishment upon some delusion, and asked himself, " Was it, then, really so ? Was this

the person I believed so great and good?" Alas! no; not *this*, but another. It was your ideal that you loved, and mistook for the reality. Seen in the bright colours of your fancy, that man appeared admirable whom now you see to be contemptible.

The other day I took up a common pebble from the shore; washed by the advancing waves, and glittering in the summer sun, it looked like a gem. I carried it home; arrived there, I took it from my pocket: the pebble was dry, its splendour had vanished, and I held it for what it was—a pebble.

Such is life, with and without its illusions.

CHAPTER V.

A TRAIT OF JULIUS ST. JOHN.

As Cecil was dressing for dinner that day, he asked himself whether he really loved Violet ; the answer was a decided negative. He had loved her till that afternoon : but that one fatal incident as completely turned his love into dislike, as it had turned Violet's into scorn. He disliked her, as we dislike those who have humiliated us, or who have witnessed some action which we know must appear contemptible in their eyes, but which we feel is not really so contemptible. He resented her superior courage ; called her coarse and unwomanly, reckless and cruel. He remembered her beating Shot on the morning of their first interview, and it now seemed to him, as then, an act of wanton severity. He remembered what her father and mother said

of her temper. They were right; she *was* a devil!

He went down to dinner quite satisfied that she was not at all the woman he should choose.

She was seated on the sofa, talking to Mrs. Broughton, and caressing the head of her favourite Shot. Marmaduke stood by her side, gazing enraptured upon her beauty.

Never was there a more adorably imperial creature than Violet. If in her riding habit, the prompt decision and energy of her manner conveyed the impression of her being somewhat masculine; directly she doffed it for the dress of her sex, she became at once a lovely, loveable woman.

I have a particular distaste to masculine women, and am therefore anxious that you should not imagine Violet one. She had, indeed, the virile energy and strength of will, which nature seems to have appointed to our sex; but all, who had any penetration, at once acknowledged that she was exquisitely feminine. Her manner had such grace, dignity, softness, and lovingness, tempering its energy and independence. She had grandeur without hardness, and gentleness without weakness. Her murderous eyes, whose flash-

ing beauty few could withstand—there was something domineering in their splendour and fulness of life—had, at the same time, a certain tenderness, the effect of which I know not how better to describe, than in the bold felicitous comparison used by Goethe's mother, when she wrote to Bettina thus: “*a violoncello was played, and I thought of thee ; it sounded so exactly like thy brown eyes.*”

I dwell with some gusto on the beauty of this creature ; she was so beautiful ! Majesty generally implies a certain stiffness : dignified women are detestable ; but there was such majesty in Violet—such commanding grace—accompanied by such soft, winning manners, that, in the midst of the sort of awe she inspired, you felt a yearning towards her. Firenuola would have said of her, and said truly, that “*getta quasi un odor di regina,*” and yet, withal, no one was more simple and womanly.

As Cecil entered the room, he just caught this conclusion of Violet's speech :—

“ Besides, had it come to the worst—had the bull made his rush, I was in very good hands. Mr. Chamberlayne and Shot were with me.”

This was uttered before she saw Cecil. She

coloured slightly as he came in, but continued her conversation in an unaltered tone. He felt no gratitude to her for sparing him, as, by this account of the affair, it was evidently her intention of doing ; his self-love was so deeply wounded, that he only perceived the covert sarcasm of again coupling him with Shot. It made him congratulate himself on being no longer in danger of offering her his hand.

“ What a wife ! ” he mentally exclaimed, as he walked up to Rose and Julius, and broke in upon their *tête-à-tête*, for which neither thanked him.

At dinner he sat between Mrs. Broughton and her niece, who, regarding him as a wit, giggled at whatever he said. He was in high spirits. His gaiety was forced, indeed, but it inspired some brilliant things, which I do not chronicle here for two reasons. First, they had no influence whatever on subsequent events. Secondly, very few repartées bear transplantation ; they have an *à propos* which gives them their zest, and are singularly tame without it.

“ By the way, Mr. St. John, Wincot has a mysterious story about you which ought to be cleared up.”

“ Pray, what is it ? ”

"Oh! something impossible, grotesque, inconceivable, but true; at least, he swears to it," said Cecil.

"Let's hear it," said Mrs. Langley Turner.

"By all means," added Mrs. Broughton.

"By all means," echoed Julius. "I find myself the hero of a romance before I was aware of it."

All eyes were turned upon Tom Wincot.

He was not averse to be looked at, so neither blushed, nor let fall the glass suspended to his eye.

Wincot is young, good-looking, well-dressed; rides well, waltzes well; gains his livelihood at whist and écarté; pays debts of honour; has no ideas; knows nothing beyond the sphere of a club or a drawing-room, and has no power over the consonant *r*.

"I consider this vewy twaitewous," he said; "when I told Chamberlayne the stowy it was under stwict secweey."

"That is to say," rejoined Cecil, "that you wished me particularly to divulge it."

"Not at all, not at all, a secwet is a secwet."

"You excite our curiosity to the highest pitch," said Mrs. Langley Turner.

"Quite thrilling," said Rose.

"Tell us the story yourself, Mr. Chamberlayne," said young Lufton.

"No, no; it is Wincot's story."

"Well; if your cuwiosity is excited, I must gwatify it. Besides, Mr. St. John has pew-
haps some explanation. Yesterday, as I was
wambling along the woad to town I saw him
wide down by the wiver. Well, would you
ewedit it? he was cawying, its twue I vow,
cawying a side of bacon!!!"

"Is that all?" asked Violet.

"All!" exclaimed the astonished dandy;
"All! why Miss Violet, I pledge you my
vewacity that I wefused to believe it, it was so
twemendous an appawition! Fancy, widing
acwoss countwy with a side of bacon on your
saddle! It must have been a wager. It must.
Why, I would as soon have dwiven my gwand-
mother down Wegent-stweet; dwank clawet
at an inn; gone to a soiwée in shoes; or any-
thing equally atwocious!"

"But let Mr. St. John explain," said Cecil
gaily. "This is a serious imputation on his
dandyism. Unless he can clear himself of the
charge, he will be utterly lost."

"What was it Julius, my dear?" said Mrs.
St. John.

"One of those things which he alone is

capable of," interposed Marmaduke, warmly. " I will ask the ladies present to judge. Happening to meet Julius with that same side of bacon, I naturally asked him how he came to have it, and he told me the story with his usual simplicity. This it is. He was riding through Little Aston on his way home, he stopped opposite a broker's shop where an auction was going on. A side of bacon was knocked down to him, much to his astonishment, but he paid for it, threw it across his saddle, and carried it twelve miles as a present to one of his poor cottagers. The poor woman was as much shocked as Mr. Wincot, to see the young squire so equipped, but her gratitude was unbounded. I could have hugged him for it; the more so, as, with all my admiration for the simple goodness and courage of the act, I doubt whether even *now* I should have courage to imitate it, and certainly should never have had such an idea come unassisted into my head."

" You are trying to make a mountain out of a molehill, Marmaduke," said Julius. " The thing was quite simple. I had to pay for the bacon; why should not one of my cottagers benefit by it?"

" Yes, yes; but carrying it yourself."

"I had not my servant with me. It was no trouble. As to what people thought, that never troubled me. Those who knew me knew what I was; those who knew me not did not bestow a thought about me."

Every one declared that it was an act of great kindness and philosophy; except Tom Wincot, who pronounced it vewy extwaowdinary, and seemed to think nothing could justify such a forgetfulness of what was due to oneself. But of all present, no one was more proud, more pleased than Rose, who looked at her "dear, little, ugly man," as she called him, with fresh admiration all the evening afterwards. It was a trait to have won her heart; if, indeed, her heart had not been won before.

CHAPTER VI.

HIDDEN MEANINGS.

THE subject of private theatricals was again started that evening, when all were assembled in the drawing-room; and as the conversation happened by chance to be one of those underneath which there runs a current of deep significance to certain parties, while to the apprehension of the rest there is nothing whatever meant beyond what is expressed; I shall detail some portions of it.

But first to dispose of the scene, as it is rather crowded. In the right-hand corner there is a rubber of whist played between Meredith Vyner and Mrs. Broughton, against Sir Harry Johnstone and Mrs. St. John.

Seated on the music-stool is Rose, who has just ceased playing, and by her stands Julius, who, having turned over her leaves, is now talking to her.

At the round table in the centre, Mrs. Meredith Vyner, Mrs. Langley Turner, Miss Broughton, and Violet are disposed among Marmaduke, Maxwell, Tom Wincot, Captain Heath, and young Lufton ; the ladies knitting purses, and engaged on tambour work : the gentlemen making occasional remarks thereon, and rendering bungling assistance in the winding of silk.

To the left, Blanche and Cecil, the latter with his guitar in his hand.

The fire blazes cheerfully. The room is brilliant with light. Mrs. Meredith Vyner is applauding herself secretly at her increasing success with Marmaduke, who she doubts not will soon have lost all his anger towards her. Maxwell looks blacker than ever, but is silent. Violet is recovering from her disappointment, and settling into *calm* contempt of Cecil. Marmaduke laughs in his sleeve at Mrs. Vyner's attempts, but is too much struck with Violet, not to be glad of anything which seems likely to smooth the path of acquaintance with her. Captain Heath is rather annoyed at having lost his accustomed seat next to Blanche, with whom he best likes to converse. Cecil has completely shaken off his depression, and is wondering he never before

discovered what incomparable eyes Blanche has.

"But about these theatricals," said Mrs. Langley Turner. "I am dying to have something settled. You, Mrs. Vyner, are the cleverest of the party, do you suggest some play. What do you say to *Othello*?"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Broughton, "don't think of tragedy."

"No, no," rejoined Mrs. Vyner; "if the audience must laugh, let it at least be *with us*."

"By all means," said Vyner, shuffling the cards; "remember, too,

Male si mandata loqueris
Aut dormitabo aut ridebo.

"At the same time," observed Mrs. Vyner; "Mr. Ashley would make a superb Othello."

"I rather think," replied Marmaduke, slightly veiling his eyes with the long lashes; "Iago would suit me better."

Mrs. Vyner affected not to understand the allusion.

"You would not *look* the villain," she said.

"Perhaps not," he replied, laughing; "but I could *act* it."

"By the way," interposed Julius, "surely that's a very false and un-Shakespearian notion

current, respecting Iago's appearance : people associate moral with physical deformity, though as Shakespeare himself says—

There is no art
To find the mind's construction in the face.

The critics, I observe, in speaking of an actor, as Iago, are careful to say, ‘he *looked* the villain.’ Now, if he looked the villain, I venture to say he did not look Iago.”

“ Mr. St. John is right,” said Cecil. “ Had Iago ‘worn his heart upon his sleeve,’ no one could have been duped by him. Whereas everybody places implicit confidence in him. He is ‘honest Iago’—a ‘fellow of exceeding honesty;’ and he is this, not only to the gull Roderigo, and the royal Othello, but equally so to the gentle Desdemona, and his companion in arms, the ‘arithmetician’ Cassio.”

“ So you see,” said Marmaduke, turning to Mrs. Vyner, “in spite of your handsome compliment, I might have the *physique de l'emploi*. Then Cecil would be a famous Cassio,

Framed to make women false.”

Mrs. Vyner asked herself, “ Is he showing me his cards? Does he mean to play Iago here, and to select Cecil as his tool? No;

he can't be such a blockhead; but what *does* he mean then?"

"If we are not to play tragedy," observed Mrs. Broughton; "what use is there in wasting argument on it. Let us think of a comedy."

"*The Rivals*," suggested Captain Heath; "it has so many good parts, and that I take to be the grand thing in private theatricals, where every one is ambitious of playing *primo violino*."

"Very natural too!" said Julius.

"*Very!*" rejoined Heath, sarcastically.

"When people laugh," said Julius, "at the vanity displayed by amateur actors, in their reluctance to play bad parts, it is forgotten that there is a wide distinction between playing for your amusement, and playing for your bread. Every actor on the stage would refuse indifferent parts, were it possible for him to do so. And when gentlemen and ladies wish to try their skill at acting, they very naturally seek to play such parts as will give their talents most scope."

"We really ought to thank Mr. St. John," said Mrs. Vyner, "for the ingenious excuse he has afforded our vanity, and he must have a good part himself as reward."

" You are very kind," said Julius; " but I have no notion whatever of acting, and must beg you to pass me over entirely, unless you want a servant, or something of that kind."

" I am sure," said Rose, in a low tone, " you would act beautifully."

" Indeed, no."

" Did you ever try?"

" Never. I have no *vis comica*; and as to tragedy, my person excludes me from that."

Rose was silent and uncomfortable; all people are when others allude to their own personal deficiencies.

" Will you play Sir Anthony, Sir Harry?"

" Two by cards . . . I beg your pardon, Mrs. Vyner . . . Sir Anthony Absolute? Yes, yes, you may put me down for that."

" And who is to be Captain Absolute? You, Mr. Ashley?"

" Perhaps Mr. Ashley would play Falkland," suggested Mrs. Broughton.

" No, no, Falkland is cut out for Mr. Maxwell—he is the most tragic amongst us."

Maxwell answered with a grim smile.

" At any rate," said Mrs. Langley Turner, " let me play Mrs. Malaprop. I quite long to be an allegory on the banks of the Nile."

" And Violet," said Mrs. Vyner, with the

slightest possible accent of sarcasm, “ can be Lydia Languish.”

“ No, mama,” replied Violet, “ you ought to play that—it would suit you.”

“ *I* play? . . . my *dear* child ! ”

“ Do you not intend to take a part? ”

“ My dear Violet, how could you suppose such a thing? ”

“ I imagined,” replied Violet, with exquisite naturalness, “ that you were an accomplished actress.”

“ So I should have said, from the little I have the pleasure of knowing of Mrs. Vyner,” observed Marmaduke.

The two arrows went home; but Mrs. Vyner’s face was impassive.

“ How imprudent Violet is! ” said Blanche, in a whisper, to Cecil.

“ Do you understand that? ” said Rose to Julius.

“ What? ”

“ Nothing, if you did not catch it.”

“ But who is to be Sir Lucius, we have n’t settled that,” said Mrs. Broughton.

“ I wather think I should play Sir Lucius O’Tigger, as my bwogue is genewally pwo-nounced so vewy I wish.”

“ But,” interposed Marmaduke, “ we have

forgotten Cecil . . . Oh ! there is Acres—a famous part!"

"Surely, Captain Absolute would be better," suggested Violet.

"Is that a sarcasm ?" Cecil asked himself.

"Anybody," rejoined Marmaduke, "can play the Captain, whereas Acres is a difficult part. It is not easy to play cowardice naturally."

This is one of those observations, which, seeming to have nothing in them, yet fall with strange acrimony on the ears of certain of the parties. It made Violet and Cecil uncomfortable.

"Besides," pursued Marmaduke, "it is a rule in acting, that we always best play the part most unlike our own ; and as Cecil happens to be the coolest of the cool in a duel, he ought to play the duel scene to perfection."

"Did you ever fight a duel, then ?" exclaimed Miss Broughton. "How romantic !"

Violet was astonished. Cecil, delighted at this opportunity of redeeming himself in her eyes, said, "Marmaduke, who was my second, will tell you that it was by no means romantic, Miss Broughton. A mere exchange of harmless shots about a very trivial circumstance."

"And," inquired Miss Broughton, with inimitable *naïveté*, "were you not afraid?"

A general laugh followed this question, except from the whist players, who were squabbling over some disputed point, and from Violet, who was asking herself the same question.

"Why," rejoined Cecil, gaily, "I suppose you would hardly have me avow it, if it were so; cowardice is so contemptible."

"Oh, I don't know," said Miss Broughton.

"If I may speak without bravado, I should say that, although I am a coward by *temperament*, I do not want bravery on reflection."

"What the deuce do you mean by bwavewy on weflection?"

"Some people," interposed Rose, laughing, "have *de l'esprit après coup*; so Mr. Chamberlayne doubtless means that he has courage when the danger is *over*. I had you there, Mr. Chamberlayne. That is my return for your uncomplimentary speech to me at dinner."

Violet blushed; Rose's jest seemed to her so cruel that she quite felt for Cecil. He also blushed, knowing the application Violet would make. The rest laughed.

"Without accepting Miss Rose's unpar-

donable interpretation," said Cecil, "I may acknowledge some truth in it; and as I am thus drawn into a sort of confession, forgive my egotism if I dwell a little longer on the subject. I am of a very nervous, excitable temperament. I shrink from anything sudden, and always tremble at sudden danger. Therefore am I constitutionally a coward. My instinct is never to front danger, but to escape it; but my reason tells me that the surest way of escaping it, in most cases, is to front it; and as soon as the suddenness is over, and I have familiarized my mind with the danger, I have coolness and courage enough to front it, whatever it may be. This is what I call bravery on reflection. My first movement, which is instinctive, is cowardly; my second, which is reflective, is courageous."

"This is so profoundly metaphysical that I can't apprehend it at all."

"I think I can," said Violet; "and the distinction seems to me to be just."

Cecil was greatly relieved, and he thanked her with a smile as he said, "I remember, some years ago, being with some ladies in a farm-yard, when a huge mastiff rushed furiously out at us. Before I had time to check my first instinctive movement, I had vaulted

over the gate and was beyond his reach ; but no sooner was I on the other side than I remembered the ladies were at his mercy. I instantly vaulted back again ; but not before the dog was wagging his tail, and allowing them to pat his head. But imagine what they thought of my gallantry ! They never forgave me. I could offer no excuse—there was none plausible enough to offer—and to this day they despise me as a coward."

" Had you given them on the spot," said Violet, gravely, " the explanation you have just given us, they would not have despised you."

" I am greatly obliged to you for the assurance."

He looked his thanks as he said this.

" Still, it must be deuced stwange to find oneself in a pwedicament, and no cowage *àpwopos*, but only on delibewate wflection."

" It is one of the misfortunes of my temperament."

" It certainly is a misfortune," said Violet.

She became thoughtful. Cecil was radiant.

CHAPTER VII.

MUTUAL SELF-EXAMINATION.

THE entrance of tea changed the conversation, and changed also the positions of the party. Cecil relinquished his place by the side of Blanche, much to her regret, and managed to get near Violet, who was anxious to make up for her previous coldness and contempt. She felt that she had wronged him. She admitted to the full his explanation of the incident which had so changed her feelings, and, with the warmth of a generous nature owning its error, she endeavoured to make him understand that she had wronged him. Two happier hearts did not beat that night.

Could they have read aright their feelings, however, they would have seen something feverish and unhealthy in this warmth. It was not the sympathy of sympathetic souls

but a mutual desire to forget, and have forgotten the feelings which had agitated them a little while ago.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner was more taciturn than was her wont. The covert insinuations Marmaduke had thrown out puzzled her extremely; while they were in sufficient keeping with what had gone before, to prevent her supposing he attached *no* meaning to them.

“ Could he really suppose her in love with Cecil ? ” she asked herself; “ and was he serious in thus presenting himself in the character of an Iago ? ”

Much did she vex her brain, and to little purpose. The truth is, she was attributing to these words a coherence and significance which they had not in Marmaduke’s mind. She assumed them to be indications of some deeply-laid scheme; whereas they were the mere spurts of the moment, seized upon by him as they presented themselves, and without any ulterior purpose. He had no plan; but he was deeply enraged against her, and lashed her with the first whip at hand. Had he been as cunning as she was, he would never have betrayed himself in this way; but being a man of vehement passions, and accustomed to give way to his impulses, it was only immense self-

command which enabled him to contain himself so much as he did. Julius went home to dream of Rose. Marmaduke to pass a sleepless night thinking of Violet. He had never seen a woman he admired so much. For the first time in his life, he had encountered a gaze that did not bend beneath his own ; for the first time he had met with one whose will seemed as indomitable as his own, whose soul was as passionate. It was very different from the effect which Mary Hardcastle had excited : it was not so irritating, but more voluptuous. In one word, the difference was this : Mary excited the lower, Violet the higher qualities of his nature. There was reverence in his feeling for Violet ; in his feeling for Mary there had been nothing but a sensual fascination.

Maxwell was restless. He was growing very jealous of Marmaduke—Mrs. Vyner's interest not escaping him. Violet was also sleepless. She thought of Marmaduke, and of the two interchanged glances which told her how they had both read alike the character of her mother ; and wondered by what penetration he had discovered it. She thought him also a magnificent—a *manly* man ; but she thought no more. Cecil occupied her mind.

As I have said, her first impulse was to

admit to the full Cecil's explanation, and to revoke her sentence of contempt. As she lay meditating on the whole of the circumstances, and examined his character calmly, she was forced to confess that if he did not deserve the accusation of cowardice, yet by his own showing his first impulse was to secure his own safety, and *then* to think of others. This looked like weakness and selfishness: two odious vices in her eyes.

The result of her meditations was, that Cecil had regained some portion of her liking, but had lost for ever all hold upon her esteem. Pretty much the same change took place in his mind with regard to her. He admitted that she was high-minded, generous, lovely—but not loveable. There was something in her which awed him, and which he called repulsive.

He went to sleep thinking what a sweet loveable creature Blanche was, and how superior to Violet.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DISADVANTAGES OF UGLINESS.

THE next day Julius was meditatively fishing in the mill-pool adjoining the village school, and trying to decipher the character of Rose, who alternately fascinated and repulsed him by her vivacity.

I have said that he was utterly destitute of all personal beauty. This is so common an occurrence, that it would scarcely be worth mentioning in any other case: beauty being the quality which, of all others, men can best dispense with. A charm when possessed, its absence is not an evil. In Julius's case, however, it happened to be important, from the importance he attributed to it, and the excessive importance given to it by him thus originated.

His nurse was a very irascible woman, and

whenever she was angry, taunted him with being such “an ugly, little fright.” As she never called him ugly but when she punished him, he early began to associate something peculiarly disagreeable with ugliness. This would have soon passed away at school, had not the boys early discovered that his ugliness was a sore point with him ; accordingly, endless were the jests and sneers which, with the brutal recklessness of boyhood, they flung at him on that score. The climax of all, was on one cold winter morning, when the shivering boy crept up to the fire, and was immediately repulsed by a savage kick from one of the elder boys there warming himself. Crying with the pain, he demanded why he was kicked. The *why* really was a simple movement of wanton brutality and love of power, usual enough among boys ; but the tyrant chose to say, “Because you’re such a beast !”

“No, I’m not,” he sobbed.

“Yes, you are, though !”

“You’ve no business to kick me ; I didn’t do anything to you.”

“I shall kick you as much as I like ; you’re so d—d ugly !”

It had never occurred to him before to be thrashed for his ugliness ; and although he

deeply felt the injustice, yet he, from that day, imagined that his appearance was a serious misfortune.

Increasing years, of course, greatly modified this impression, but the effect was never wholly effaced. From the constant dinning in his ears that he was ugly, he had learned to accept it as a fact, about which there could be no dispute, but which no more troubled him than the consciousness that he was not six feet high. He became hardened to the conviction. Sneers or slights affected him no more. He was ugly, and knew it. To tell him of it was to tell him of that to which he had long made up his mind, and about which he had no vestige of vanity.

It is remarkable how conceited plain people are of their persons. You hear the fact mentioned and commented on in society, as if it were surprising; and you catch yourself "wondering" at some illustration of it, as if experience had not furnished you with numberless examples of the same kind. But the explanation seems to me singularly simple. You have only to take the reverse of the medal, and observe that beauty is not half so solicitous of admiration as deformity, and the solution of the question must present itself. Conceit—

at least that which shows itself to our ridicule, is an eager solicitation of our admiration. Now, beauty being that which calls forth spontaneous admiration, needs not to be solicitous ; and the more unequivocal the beauty, the less coquettish the woman. When, however, a woman's beauty is so equivocal that some deny it, while others admit it, the necessity for confirmation makes her solicitous of every one's praise ; and she exhibits coquetry and conceit —due proportion being allowed for the differences in amount of love of approbation inherent in different individuals (a condition which influences the whole of this argument). Carry this further, and arrive at positive plainness, and you have this result : the *amour propre* of the victim naturally softens the harsh outlines of the face. He sees himself in a more becoming mirror. However, the fact may have been forced upon him, that he is ill-looking, he never knows the *extent* of his ugliness, and he is aware that people differ immensely in their estimates of him ; he has—fatal circumstance ! even been admired. Now, admiration is such a balm to the wounded self-love, that he craves for more—he is eager to solicit an extension of it, and hence that desire to attract closer attention to him manifested by audacity of

dress, certain that the closer he is observed, the more he must be admired. He feels he is not so ugly as people say ; he knows some do not think so ; he wants your confirmation of the discerning few. In a thousand different ways he solicits some of your admiration. You see his object, and smile at his conceit.

Now the effect of Julius St. John's education had been to cut out, root and branch, that needless desire to be admired for what he knew was not admirable. He had made up his mind to his ugliness. The benefit was immense. It saved him from the hundred tortures of self-love to which he must otherwise have been exposed—that Tantalus thirst for admiration which cannot be slaked ; and it imparted a quiet dignity to his manner, which was not without its charm.

The deplorable circumstance was, that he had also imbibed a notion of the great importance of beauty in the eyes of women, which made him consider himself incapable of being loved. As a boy, maid-servants had refused to be kissed by him, because he was “a fright.” As a young man, he had often been conscious that girls said they were engaged when he asked them to dance, because they would not dance with one so ugly. In the novels which

he read the heroes were invariably handsome, and great stress was laid upon their beauty; while the villains and scoundrels were as invariably ill-favoured. The conversation of girls ran principally upon handsome men; and their ridicule was inexhaustible upon the unfortunates whom Nature had treated like a stepmother.

One trait will paint the whole man. They were one day talking about ugliness at the Hall, when Rose exclaimed : “ After all beauty is but *skin deep*.”

“ True,” he replied, “ but opinion is no deeper.”

That one word revealed to her the state of his mind on the subject. And although he often thought of Swift, Wilkes, Mirabeau, and other hideous men celebrated for their successes with women ; he more often thought of the bright-eyed, hump-backed, gifted, witty, humble Pope, who so bitterly expiated his presumption in raising his thoughts to the lovely Mary Wortley Montague. If genius could not compensate for want of beauty, how should he, who had no genius, not even shining talents, succeed in making a woman pardon his ugliness ?

That Julius was strangely in error you may

easily suppose ; but this was perhaps the only crotchet of his honest upright mind. A truer, manlier creature never breathed. He was carved from the finest clay of humanity ; and, although possessing none of those distinguished talents which separate a few men from their contemporaries, and throw a lustre over perhaps weak and unworthy natures, yet of no one that I have ever known could I more truly say,—

His life was gentle ; and the elements
So mixed in him, that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, *This was a man !*

To know him was to love him ; it was more, it was to revere him. There was something ennobling in his intercourse. You felt that all he did and said sprang from the purest truth. He was utterly unaffected, and won your confidence by the simple truthfulness of his whole being. There was perhaps as little of what is supposed to captivate women in his person and manner as in any man I ever knew ; but, at the same time, I never knew a man so calculated to make a wife adore him. In a word —he could not flirt, but he could love.

The reader will be at no loss to discover the reason of certain doubts and hesitations on his part respecting Rose, with whom he was

greatly charmed, and of whom he was also greatly afraid. The very vivacity which allured, alarmed him. She was so bright, so brilliant, that he was afraid to trust his heart in her keeping, lest she should be as giddy as she was gay ; and, above all, lest she should scorn the mediocrity of such a man as he knew himself to be. His first impulse was always to seek her society, to sun himself in her eyes, to let his soul hold unrestrained communion with hers ; but, when he came to reflect on the delicious hours he had spent by her side, he trembled lest they should be only luring him into an abyss from which there would be no escape.

Early in life he had suffered bitterly from such a deception. He fell in love with a beautiful and lively cousin of his, who, perhaps from coquetry, perhaps from thoughtlessness, certainly exhibited such signs of returning his affection, that he one day ventured to overcome his timidity, and declared his passion. She only laughed at him ; and that very evening he heard her answer her mother's remonstrances on the giddiness of her conduct towards him by saying, “ But, dear mama, who could have supposed that he was serious ; the idea of a woman marrying *him*.”

"He is an excellent creature," said the mother.

"Perhaps so, but you must confess he is very ugly."

Julius heard no more; it was a girl of sixteen in all her thoughtlessness who spoke, but those words were never effaced from his memory.

The truth is, Rose was as saucy as youth, beauty, and uncontrollable spirits could make her, and the general impression she made on men was, that of being too *flirty* and giddy for love.

Julius was fishing that day with no sport but in the chase of his own fantastic thoughts; which every philosophic fisherman must admit is part of the great pleasure in throwing out the line. People wonder what amusement can be found in fishing, and Dr. Johnson's definition is thought triumphant; but if they will allow one of the most unskilful anglers that ever handled a rod to answer, I would say, that when you have good sport, it is a pleasant excitement, and when you catch nothing, it is a most dulcet mode of meditating. You sit in the boat or stand on the bank: the river runs gently and equably before you; the

float wanders with it ; and the current of your thoughts is undisturbed.

No sport did Julius have that day ; not a single “run ;” but as a compensation he was joined by Rose herself, who had been to visit Mrs. Fletcher, the schoolmistress, to encourage the children.

“ How is it,” said Rose, “ Mr. Ashley is not with you ? Does he not indulge in this gentle sport ? or is he too tender-hearted ? for it is monstrously cruel you know !”

“ Marmaduke is not calm enough in his temperament for anything so sedate as fishing ; and I doubt whether he would think much of any sporting less exciting than a tiger hunt, or perhaps a boar hunt. What do you think of him ?”

“ I don’t think at all of him. In one evening I am not able to form an opinion of any one ; at least,” checking herself, “ not often. He didn’t say anything remarkably brilliant, did he ?”

“ Brilliant ! No.”

“ The only part of his conversation I remember is what he related of you and your side of bacon. I liked his manner of telling that. It was in a tone of real friendship.”

“ Yes, Marmaduke has a regard for me. But don’t you think him superbly handsome ? ”

“ I don’t like handsome men.”

This was said with perfect unaffectedness ; but he raised his eyes quickly, and gave her just such a look as she remembered him to have given her once before, when they were talking of Leopardi, and it embarrassed her. Indeed, said to an ugly man, this had an equivocal sound : it was either a sarcasm or a declaration.

“ You are singular, then,” was his quiet reply.

“ Why singular, in preferring brains to beauty ? Are we women really, do you think, the children we are said to be, and only fit to be amused with dolls ? That is not like your usual respect for our sex ! ”

“ Come, come, you do not state the case fairly. The question is not, whether you or your sex prefer beauty to brains, but whether you prefer beauty to ugliness ? It is curious to notice how this question is always confused in this way, by mixing up with it an element that does not properly belong to it. People say, ‘ Oh, a clever plain man before a handsome fool ! ’ and then argue, as if all the plain

men were necessarily clever, and all the handsome men imperatively fools."

" Well, I'm sure, handsome men generally are—not, perhaps, fools—but certainly not clever; they think of nothing but their beauty. *Their* beauty—the frights!"

" I cannot agree with you. Running over the list of great men you will find the proportion greatly in favour of handsome men; which, when you come to reflect how few handsome men there are compared to the thousands of ugly men, is the more striking. The reason I take to be this: these men, from their very intellectual greatness, must have had great beauty of expression, so that with features a little better than ordinary they would rank among the handsome. It may be said, indeed, that very fine organizations include genius and beauty."

" Oh!" she replied, laughing, " if I once get into an argument with you, you'll make out anything. But I won't be browbeaten by logic: 'hang up philosophy!' as Benedict says. I'm as difficult to be reasoned out of my convictions as if I were a logician myself. I *don't* like handsome men, I have said it; nor shall you reason me into liking them."

"Very well, very well. I certainly have no cause to wish it."

"Except the love of victory in argument, eh?"

"The victory must be on my side; it is gained already. If two men equal in talent and goodness, but greatly unequal in appearance, were placed before you, the handsomer must excite the preference, and that is all our cause of battle amounts to."

"Oh, men, men! how you *will* argue!"

At this moment they were joined by Marmaduke, who was all anxiety about the private theatricals; not for themselves, but because he saw in them an excellent excuse for being constantly at the Hall, and in Violet's society.

With his usual impetuosity Marmaduke had already settled that Violet should be his wife. Love at first sight, which may be a fiction with regard to the colder children of the north, is no fiction with regard to such passionate natures as his; and he was in love with Violet, without seeking to disguise it. Indeed, he spoke in such raptures of her to Rose, that she smiled and looked significantly at Julius, who returned her glance, and confirmed her suspicions.

CHAPTER X.

THE GREAT COMMENTATOR.

“Eccovi un de’ compositor di libri bene meriti di republica, postillatori, glosatori, construttori, additatori, scoliatori, traduttori!

. . . O bella etimologia, e di mio proprio Marte or ora *deprompta!* Or dunque quindi *prope jam versus movo* il gresso, per che voglio notarla *majoribus literis* nel mio *propriarum elucubrationum libro.*”—GIORDANO BRUNO. *Candelajo.*

DURING this conversation between the lovers, another pair of undeclared lovers were standing on the steps of the terrace, “talking of lovely things that conquer death,” and yielding themselves up to the luxury of a *tête-à-tête*, wherein glances were more eloquent than tongues, and hearts fluttered like new-caught birds, at the most seemingly insignificant phrase.

These were Cecil and Blanche. I call them undeclared lovers, because not only were they

ignorant of each other's feelings, but ignorant also of their own. Blanche's love had been of gradual growth. The lively, handsome, accomplished Cecil had early made a deep impression on her, though her shy, retiring disposition gave no signs of it; and his attentions on the evening before had been so delightful that she was still under their influence.

That in relinquishing Violet, he should turn to her complete opposite, Blanche, is nothing but what one may have anticipated. Her charms were brought into stronger relief by the contrast; and it has always been remarked that the heart is never so susceptible to a new impression as when it has been in any way robbed of an old affection. Partly, no doubt, because the feelings are best attuned to love when in that state of unsatisfied excitement; for,—

Say that upon the altar of her beauty
You sacrifice your tears, your sighs, your heart,

still, the sacrifice is so sweet, that it is with difficulty we forego it; and if the *object* change, the *feeling* still remains. Partly, also, because the *amour propre*, outraged by a defeat, is glad to be flattered by the chance of a new success.

There they stood, enchanting and enchanted, when Meredith Vyner put his head out of the glass door of the drawing-room which opened on to the terrace, and said, "Mr. Chamberlayne, you are not doing anything particular, are you?"

"Not at all, sir."

"Then, if you have nothing better to amuse you, just step with me into my study; I have a new discovery to communicate, which will, I think, delight you."

Nothing better to amuse him! to leave Blanche for some twaddle about Horace! was it not provoking? But he was forced to go, there was no escaping. If anything could have compensated him, it would have been the expression of impatience on Blanche's face, and the look with which she seemed to say, "Don't stay too long."

When they were in the study, Meredith Vyner placed his snuff-box on the table, and, resting his left foot on the fender, began stroking his protuberant calf in a very deliberate manner. This was a certain sign of his being at that moment struggling with some conception, which demanded the greatest clearness and composure, adequately to bring forth. His mind was tottering under the weight of an

unusual burden. As the left hand slowly descended the inner part of his leg, from the knee to the ankle, and as slowly ascended again the same distance, Cecil saw that he was arranging in his head something of more consequence than a verbal criticism. "The discovery I am about to impart," he said at last, with a slight pomposity, "is not perfectly elaborated in my mind, since the first gleam of it only came to me last night. It kept me sleepless. I have meditated profoundly on it since, and I am now in a condition to communicate it to you."

In spite of the solemnity of this introduction, Cecil, whose thoughts were on the terrace, found great difficulty in assuming a proper air of attentive interest. Vyner did not remark it, but continued:—

"The discovery is so simple when once mentioned—like all truly great discoveries—that one asks oneself, is it possible that hitherto it should have been overseen? It goes, however, to nothing less than the entire revolution of the Horatian Sapphic. Look here: you must often, I am sure, have been disagreeably affected by the absurdity of

Labitur ripa, Jove non probante, *u-*
xorius amnis.

“This sort of caprice is very funny in Canning’s

U.
-niversity of Göttingen;

but only tolerable in comic verse: in a serious ode it is detestable, and I cannot believe so careful and fastidious a poet (who was no innovator, recollect! none of your *école romantique!*) guilty of it . . .”

“You propose a new reading?” suggested Cecil, feeling called upon to make some remark.

“New reading! no: that is the paltry trick of a commentator, who endeavours to escape a difficulty by denying its existence. No, no; my edition will have none of these trivialities. Everything I print shall have a solid substance. I intend my edition *to last*. To the point, however; the difficulty vanishes at once if we suppose, as is most natural to believe, that Horace’s Sapphics, were not composed of *four* lines but of *three*—the fourth line being really nothing but the Adonic termination to the third—like the tail to an Italian sonnet—or better still, like the lengthening of the concluding line in the Spenserian stanza: which has a magnificent swing and sweep in its amplitude, as if gathering up into its mighty

arms the rich redundancy of poetic inspiration.
Thus instead of

Iliæ dum se nimium querenti
Jactat ultorem, vagus et sinistra
Labitur ripa, Jove non probante, u-
orius amnis.

The verses read thus:—

Iliæ dum se nimium querenti
Jactat ultorem, vagus et sinistra
Labitur ripa, Jove non probante, uxorius amnis.

And so throughout. Does not the sweep of this last line carry a fine harmony with it? Is it not incomparably superior to the mean, niggling, clipping versification as we usually receive it? There cannot be a question about it. And if you come to reflect, you will see how the error has crept in by the copyists being cramped for room, and writing the Adonic addition below, as if it were a new line. But it is no more a new line, than the additional syllables in Spenser are new lines; nevertheless, we often see printers forced to break a line into two. Here is an example,” taking up a volume, “which occurs in Tennyson, whom I opened this morning.” And he read aloud:—

“ They call me cruel-hearted, but I care not what they say,
For I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother, I'm to be
Queen o' the May.”

“ Therec,” throwing the book down, “ now

suppose a few centuries hence all our literature to have perished, except half a dozen poets, some noodle of a commentator will imagine that ‘Queen o’ the May’ is a separate verse, and will write learned twaddle on the versification of the English!”

An ample pinch closed this triumphant pe-
roration; and Vyner holding his head slightly
downwards to bring his nose in contact with
his finger and thumb, looked up over that
finger and thumb at Cecil, who had for some
minutes ceased to hear what he was saying,
having caught a glimpse of Blanche walking
on the lawn with Captain Heath. Cecil dis-
liked the Captain; and now a vague senti-
ment of jealousy hovered about his mind. No
wonder, then, if he paid little heed to his host,
and his host’s observations on an idle point of
philology. Of late he had become horribly
bored by these consultations, and had often
wished Horace and his amateur editor buried
irrecoverably beneath the dust of Herculaneum;
but never was his inattention so ill-timed as
on that occasion!

“ What are you looking at?” inquired
Vyner, in a tone which his politeness could not
completely subdue.

"Looking at? Nothing," said Cecil embarrassed. "I was reflecting —."

"Oh! on my discovery?"

"Yes. It occurs to me that I have met with it before somewhere."

Cecil said this by way of cutting short the discussion, perfectly aware that Vyner was too much of a commentator to care one straw about an opinion, unless he were the originator.

"Impossible! Im - poss - ible!" ejaculated Vyner, much in the strain that Dominie Sampson may have ejaculated 'prodigious!'

"It's very ingenious," said Cecil, who did not know a word about it, "very; and true."

"Yes, yes, but you think it is not original? Its originality is everything with me."

"Perhaps as some compromise between your theory and the ordinary one, you might say that the *orius amnis* and the Adonic termination generally is only a termination, not a new verse."

"Compromise!" exclaimed the astonished Vyner, "why that *is* my theory!"

Cecil was posed. Convicted of such palpable inattention as to have suggested as an improvement the very idea which had just been explained to him, he could but stutter out some incoherent phrases of excuse.

Vyner was doubly hurt. The inattention was one offence, but that was nothing to the careless way in which Cecil had proposed as an indifferent modification the grand discovery he, Vyner, had made, which was to immortalize him. With an air of quiet dignity, which Cecil had never seen before, the offended philologist assuring him he was not ripe yet for such subjects, which could scarcely be a matter of surprise at his age, he bowed him out.

CHAPTER XI.

CECIL AGAIN WRITES TO FRANK.

ALTHOUGH you have not answered my letters, Frank, I must write to you once more, if only to gratify that *besoin d'épanchement* which all lovers feel. Were I a century or two older, I might carve my Blanche's name on every tree, *comme cela se pratiquait autrefois*; but being a frock-coated-nineteenth-century prosaic creature, I am condemned to write on unsentimental Bath post, that which should be confided only to the trees.

You will doubtless raise those wondering eyebrows at the sight of the name Blanche. It is not an erratum for Violet, I assure you; I have given up all thoughts of that high-spirited, imperial, but imperious creature. I looked into my heart and found I loved her not. She is evidently hurt at my inconstancy;

but, on nearer acquaintance, I found Blanche so infinitely preferable, that I could not help making the comparison. Fortunately I had not gone too far to recede, and the haughty girl will, I dare say, soon be consoled.

I have not given you a description of Blanche. Shakspeare has anticipated it in these lines—

If lusty Love should go in quest of beauty,
Where should he find it but in Lady Blanche?

She is very fair, with a skin of dazzling loveliness, long dreamy eyes, always moist with emotion, an exquisite smile, a low soft voice—"an excellent thing in woman"—and a wondrous head of hair, which has that bright golden hue which Italians prize so highly—indeed, Firenzuola says, "*che de' capelli il proprio e vero colore è esser biondi.*"

We have all but declared our passion. It has been declared by our eyes, but as yet I have had no favourable opportunity of doing it in form. That she loves me, I am certain; still more certain that I love her. She is the only woman I ever met who would make me happy, and I feel that she will change me into a quiet, domestic being. High time too, seeing that I have squandered my patrimony. However, what with my four thousand pounds, and

the handsome dowry Vyner will assuredly give his daughter, we shall be able to live modestly till I can get diplomatic employment. Once his son-in-law, Vyner will be forced to exert his interest in my behalf.

By the way, it is fortunate I have already captured Blanche's affections, for I have certainly lost all Vyner's favour, at least for the present. He was giving me a tedious account of some twaddling notion he had excogitated about Horace's versification, to which I paid all the less attention, as my eyes were then following Blanche, who was engaged in a deep conversation with Captain Heath. Unfortunately I betrayed my inattention, and he has not forgotten it. He is now distant and almost cold in his manner, and never mentions Horace. I must regain his confidence by some splendid emendation. If not, I must trust to Blanche to purchase my forgiveness.

The house is lightened of Mrs. Broughton and her niece, and young Lufton. I regret the last named; he has been useful to me, in losing seventy pounds to me after winning two ponies at billiards.

Yours ever,
CECIL.

CHAPTER XII.

CECIL PUT TO THE TEST.

“ You think me unjust to Mr. Chamberlayne,” said Captain Heath one morning to Blanche, as they sat together in the drawing-room discussing the character of her lover, “ because you are so young and know so little of the world, that you trust appearances, and cannot pierce beneath them.”

“ But I cannot be mistaken in supposing him very good hearted, and wonderfully clever.”

“ He is good tempered, not good hearted ; cleverish, but not clever. It is natural that you should mistake the characteristics of good temper for those of a good heart—most people do so.”

“ And is not a good temper a sign of a good heart ? ”

"No, my dear Blanche, not in the least; it is very often only the sign of a weak and indolent organization—sometimes of mere cold selfishness. You look indignant. I do not say it is a sign in him of selfishness, I only say it is no sign of goodness."

"But what makes you so illiberal towards him?"

"Illiberal! I am merely and strictly just. I do not like him, because he is weak and insincere."

"Insincere!"

"Yes; he toadies your father by pretending to care about Horace and your father's commentary, which he laughs at behind his back."

"It is your dislike," said Blanche, rising and colouring, "which distorts your usual candid judgment. You do not like him, and you misinterpret everything. I won't have him abused. I like him very much—very much, and I can't sit and hear you talk so of him." She left the room.

Captain Heath did not stir. He had never seen such an exhibition of temper on the part of Blanche before. She was greatly moved, it was evident. And there could be but one cause for her agitation—that cause made the captain thoughtful.

The truth is, he loved Blanche, and now seemed for the first time to see that she loved Cecil. He had vaguely suspected it before. This was a confirmation. His lip quivered as he said, "She is perhaps right. My dislike may be groundless. I will try him."

Cecil shortly afterwards sauntered in.

"Are you for a game at billiards," said the captain.

Cecil stared at such an invitation from one whom he had never seen in the billiard-room since his arrival, but accepted, with some curiosity as to how the "solemn prig" would play.

The dislike was mutual; and mutually did they libel each other.

"By George! you play a first-rate game," said Cecil, amazed at the skill of his antagonist, whom he expected to find an indifferent hand.

"Yes, I play well," quietly answered the captain. "I used to play a great deal when with my regiment. But you are stronger at it than I am."

Cecil thought so, but would not acknowledge it. Nevertheless, the captain won three games in succession, which considerably irritated his antagonist, who began to swear at the

chalk, to abuse the table, to change his cues frequently, and to throw the blame of his non-success upon anything and everything except his want of skill.

The captain, who was critically observing him throughout the game to see if his opinion was well or ill founded, smiled scornfully at all these ebullitions. He had judged rightly in assuming that the best moment for observing a man's real character is during a game of chance and skill combined. Then it is that a man unbends, and shows himself as he really is. The self-love is implicated; and, as both vanity and money are at stake, you see a mind acting under the impulsion of two of its most powerful stimulants. Cecil, who was both vain and weak, was betrayed into a hundred little expressions of his character; and, as he was also somewhat less than delicate—without being at all dishonourable—in money matters, he led the captain to think ill of him on that score.

Having made up his mind as to Cecil's real worth, he determined to put him to the trial on a matter in which he was himself directly interested.

"Have you ever played with Violet?" he asked. "She is a wonderful hand. But then

she does everything well. (I doubt whether I can make this cannon—yes, there it is.) What a splendid creature she is! Isn't she?"

"Splendid, indeed! They are all three lovely girls, though in such different styles."

"(How stands the game? Seven, love: good.) What a sad thing it is, though, to think such girls should be absolutely without fortune. (Good stroke!)"

Cecil was chalking his cue when this bomb fell at his feet; he suspended that operation, and said,—

"What do you mean by their having no fortune?"

"Why, the estate is entailed, and Vyner, who is already greatly in debt, will neither have saved any money to leave them when he dies, nor be able to give them anything but their trousseaux when they marry."

"The devil!"

"(That's a teasing stroke: one of the worst losing hazards. You must take care.)"

This last remark, though applied to the game, was too applicable to Cecil's own condition for him not to wince. The captain's eye was upon him.

"What a d—d shame!" exclaimed Cecil,

for a man with an entailed estate to make no provision for his children. It's positively monstrous!"

"Horrible, indeed!"

"Why, what is to become of them at his death?"

"They will be penniless," gravely replied the captain, as he sent the red ball whizzing into the pocket.

"I wonder he is not ashamed to look them in the face," said Cecil, duly impressed with the enormity.

"He trusts, I suppose, to their marrying rich men," carelessly added the captain. "(Game! I win everything!)"

Cecil declined to play any longer. He went up into his own room, and locked himself in, there to review his situation, the aspect of which the recent intelligence had wonderfully altered.

Captain Heath shrugged his shoulders, quietly lighted a cigar, and strolled out, well satisfied with the result of his experiment.

Then he met Blanche, who came up to him, holding out her hand, and asking forgiveness.

"I was very naughty," she said, "but you have spoiled me so, that you must not be

astonished if I do not behave myself to you as to my best friend. But the truth is, I was angry with you, and now I am angry with myself. Am I forgiven?"

He only pressed her hand, and looked the answer. She put her arm within his, and walked with him to the river, where they got into the boat, and he rowed her gently down. She prattled to him in her prettiest style all the way, for she was quite happy at having "made it up with her darling Captain Heath."

It should be observed that, although he was no more than five and thirty, yet, to the girls, he was always an elderly man, they having known him from childhood. They were extremely fond of him, as he was of them; but they laughed outright at one of their companions, asking Rose if there was anything like flirtation between them.

"Flirtation!" exclaimed Rose. "Why, he is bald!"

The hair, indeed, was somewhat worn away above the forehead; but this was from the friction of his hussar cap, not from age.

"No, no, my dear," continued Rose, "I make no havoc with the highly-respectable-but-eminently-unfitted-for-flirtation race of papas and grandpapas. My Cupid is in no need

of a *toupet*; and if I am to be shot, it shall not be with a gouty arrow. Captain Heath is handsome—or has been—and though his moustachios are as dark and silky as a guardsman's need be, yet he has one *leetle* defect—his age makes him respectable!"

In consequence of this notion, they neither thought of falling in love with him themselves, nor of the probability of his falling in love with them. They were, therefore, as unrestrained with him as with a brother or an uncle. Blanche was his especial favourite and constant companion. He knew well that she regarded him as too old to be loved, but trusted that her eyes would be opened to the fact, that there was really no great disparity between them.

"I have been playing billiards with Mr. Chamberlayne this morning," said the captain, as he rested on his oars, and allowed the stream to float them quietly down.

"You have? Then I hope your opinion is changed."

"So far from it, I prophesy that his attentions to you—which have been marked of late—will visibly decrease, until they relapse into mere insignificance. And all because I casually remarked that your father's estate, being

entailed, and he being in debt, you and your sisters were portionless."

"And you suppose him capable of —oh ! this is too bad. It is ungenerous."

"My dear Blanche, I may be wrong, but I fear I am not; let me not, however, be condemned, till the event condemns me. Watch him!"

"You shall own you have calumniated him ; the event shall prove it," she said with great warmth.

A dark shade passed across his brow, and he rowed rapidly on. Not another word passed between them.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW A LOVER VACILLATES.

CECIL's reflections had not been cheering. Although he felt himself too much in love with Blanche to give her up because she was portionless, he was, at the same time, too well aware of his own slender resources to think of marrying upon them. Bred to luxurious habits, he was not one by whom poverty could be lightly treated.

The more he reflected, the more urgent it appeared to him that he should conquer his passion, and save himself from perdition. Could Captain Heath have read what was passing in his rival's mind, he would have smiled grimly at this verification of his suspicions, and rejoiced in the success of an

experiment which removed that rival from his path.

As Cecil descended into the drawing-room that day before dinner, he was struck painfully by the sight of Violet on the sofa in exactly the same attitude—caressing Shot—as she had appeared to him on that afternoon when he had relinquished all idea of her. The coincidence affected him.

“There is a fate against my marrying into this family,” he said to himself: “first one, and then the other.”

Blanche was standing at the window, looking out. She turned her head towards him as he entered, and felt a little mortified to see him throw himself into a chair by the side of Rose, with whom he began a lively chat.

Captain Heath, who had watched this manœuvre, now looked at Blanche; but she, conscious of his gaze, avoided it, and again resumed her contemplation of the undulating lawn and woody distance.

Dinner was announced. Meredith Vyner, as usual, took Mrs. Langley Turner; Sir Harry Johnstone, Mrs. Vyner; and Tom Winicot, Violet. Cecil, to Rose’s surprise, offered

her his arm, which was natural enough, inasmuch as he had been talking to her up to that time; but still, as for many days he had invariably managed to take Blanche, she could not help remarking the circumstance.

Captain Heath walked up to Blanche, who remained at the window; her heart throbbing violently, her mind distracted with contradictory thoughts.

"Blanche," he said, tenderly, "we are the last."

"I shall not dine to-day," she said, angrily, hurt at the pity of his tone.

"My dear Blanche, do not betray yourself; do not give *him* reason to suppose his neglect can affect you."

She sighed, put her arm within his, and walked silently with him into the dining-room.

She sat opposite Cecil, who seemed more talkative than usual. No one remarked her silence—she seldom spoke at dinner, except to her neighbour. No one asked her if she were ill, though she sent away her plate each time untouched. Cecil and Captain Heath observed it; both with pain.

Keen were the pangs she suffered at this fulfilment of the captain's cruel prophecy, and bitterly did she at that moment hate him for having undeceived her. That Cecil avoided her was but too evident. That his neglect could have but the one motive Captain Heath had ascribed was never doubted; but she threw all the blame on the captain's officiousness in speaking about their want of fortune, and in fact, with all the unreasonableness of suffering, hated him as the proximate cause of her pain.

Captain Heath applauded his own sagacity as a reader of character, and rejoiced as a lover in the success of his calculation. But he rejoiced too soon. Like most men he had erred in his calculation, because he dealt with human nature as if it were simple, instead of being, as it really is, strangely complex; and as if one motive was not counteracted by another. This is the grand source of the errors committed by cunning people: they are said to be "too cunning" when they overreach themselves by what seems an artful and logically-reasoned calculation; but the truth is, they have not been cunning enough. They

have planned their plans as if the mind of man were to be treated like a mathematical problem, not as a bundle of motives, of prejudices, and of passions. The plan may look admirable on paper; but then it is constructed on the assumption that the victim must needs be impelled by certain motives; whereas, when it comes into execution, we find that some other motives are brought into play, the existence of which was not allowed for in the calculation; and these entirely subvert the plan.

Captain Heath's plan erred in precisely this way. Judging Cecil's character in the main aright, he justly argued that such a man would shun poverty as a pestilence, because he was weak, and money is power; and that he would shrink from affronting the world with no other aid than his own right hand. He therefore concluded that an intimation of Vyner's affairs would be an effectual method of putting an end to Cecil's attentions.

Now this argument would have no flaw in it, if we assume that a man is led solely by prudential considerations: it would be perfect, were men swayed solely by their reason.

Cecil's *views* were precisely such as Captain Heath had suspected. But then Cecil had emotions, passions, senses—and these the captain had left out of the calculation. Yet these, which are the stronger powers in every breast, were to overthrow the captain's plan.

Cecil in his own room, surveying his situation, was a very different man from Cecil in the presence of his beloved, pained at the aspect of her pain, and conscience-stricken as he gazed upon her lovely, sorrowing face. His heart smote him for his selfishness, and he was asking himself whether he *could* give her up—whether poverty with her were not preferable to splendour with another, when he thought he saw something in the captain's look which betokened scornful triumph.

“Can he have deceived me? Does he wish to get me out of the way?” he said to himself. “Egad! I think so. The game at billiards this morning—that was mysterious. What could induce him to propose such a thing to me—he who never took the slightest notice of me before? He had some motive. And then his story about Vyner's affairs—fudge! I won't believe it, until I have it on better authority.”

The ladies rose from the table.

"I sha'n't sit long over the wine," Cecil whispered to Blanche, as she passed him.

A sudden gleam irradiated her sweet face, as she raised it towards him with a smile of exquisite joy and gratitude. That one word had rolled the heavy stone which was lying on her heart, and gave the lie to all the "base insinuations of that odious Captain Heath."

'Twas thus she spoke of one she really loved, and who loved her more than anything on earth!

The men drew their chairs closer together, and commenced that onslaught on the dessert which is characteristic of such moments.

"Have you never remarked," said Cecil, "that men refuse to touch fruit until the women retire, and then attack it as if their appetites had been sharpened by restraint?"

"It is, I pwesume, upon the pwinciple of compensation," said Tom Wincot. "Depwived of the fwuit of humanity, the gwapes, apwicots, and nectawines of life, we are thwown upon the fwuit of nature! I say, Cecil, isn't that vewy poetically expwessed?"

"Very. But I don't think much of the

compensation myself. I should like the women to remain with us as they do abroad."

"That," said Meredith Vyner, "would spoil dinners. The pleasantest part is the conversation after the ladies have retired."

"Besides," objected Tom Wincot, "however pleasant the society of women, one can't be always with them. *Toujours perdrix!*"

"*Toujours de la perdrix,*" interposed Vyner, glad of an opportunity of setting any one right. "If you must quote French, quote it at least correctly."

"Isn't *toujours perdrix* cowect, Mr. Mewerdith Vyner. I never heard it expwessed otherwise."

"No, sir, it is grossly incorrect. The phrase is attributed to Louis XV. who excused his conjugal inconstancy by saying, that although partridges might be a dainty dish, '*Mangez toujours de la perdrix, et vous en serez bien vite rassasié*,' was his witty but immoral remark. The claret is with you, Mr. Wincot."

"By the way," said Cecil, who was anxious to regain Vyner's goodwill, by flattering his vanity, "I have a theory which I must call upon your stores of learning, Mr. Vyner, to

assist me in developing.” Vyner bowed, and with his forefinger and thumb prepared a pinch of snuff, while Cecil continued—“ It was suggested to me by Talleyrand’s witticism that language was given to man to *conceal* his thoughts.”

“ Talleyrand,” said Vyner gravely, “ is not the author of that joke; though it is commonly attributed to him. The author is a man now* living in Paris, M. Harel, some of whose *bon mots* are the best I ever heard. I remember his describing to me M. Buloz, the proprietor of *The Revue des Deux Mondes* and *The Revue de Paris*, as a man who was “ l’âme de deux revues, avec *l’attention habile* de n’en être jamais l’esprit.”

“ *L’attention habile*,” exclaimed Cecil, laughing loudly, “ is exquisite. To my theory, however.”

“ No, no; none of your theowies,” said Wincot, “ they are always pwepostewously exaggewated.”

“ You shall judge,” replied Cecil, “ in saying language was given to us to conceal our thoughts, M. Harel explained the construction

* 1840. He died in 1846.

of a great many words in all tongues. Thus demonstration is evidently derived from *demon*, the father of lies."

"That is vewy faw fetched. Pass the clawet."

"Then, again, Mr. Vyner will tell you," pursued Cecil, "that the Greek verb to govern is *ἀναστῶ*, which is derived from *ἀναστά*, a queen, not from *ἄναξ*, a king. Now, you will admit, that to deduce the governing principle from the weaker sex is only a bit of irony. The mildest possible symbol is used for the severest possible office, viz., government. The soft delicious sway of woman who leads humanity by the nose is not to be disputed. Bearded warriors, steel-clad priests, ambitious nobles, a ragged, mighty, and mysterious plebs, these no *single* arm could possibly subdue. And yet a king is necessary. Here the grand problem presents itself: how to force the governed to accept a governor?"

"Oh! pass the clawet!"

"The king," said Vyner, shutting his box, "is the strongest. König, Könning, or *can*-ning: he is the one who *can* rule."

"But," replied Cecil, "I maintain he *can't*

rule : no man was ever strong enough to rule men. The true solution of the problem is, *that the first king was a woman.*"

" This is fuwiously widiculous !"

" Laugh ! laugh ! I am prepared to maintain that woman is weak, and *omnipotent because of her weakness.* She is girt with the proof armour of defencelessness. A man you knock down, but who dares raise a hand against a woman ?"

" Very true," suggested Vyner, " very true. What says Anacreon, whom Plato calls 'the wise ?' Nature, he says, gave horns to bulls, and a ' chasm of teeth to lions ;' but when she came to furnish woman with weapons,

τι οὖν δίδωσι ; κάλλος.

Beauty, beauty was the tremendous arm which was to surpass all others."

" And formidably she uses it," continued Cecil. " To man's violence she opposes her ' defencelessness '—and nails ; to his strength she opposes her ' weakness '—and tongue."

" In support of your theory," said Vyner, " the French call a queen a *reine* ; and we say the king *reigns.*"

He chuckled prodigiously at this pun, which Cecil pronounced admirable.

“ My theory of kingship is this,” said Cecil. “ The first king, as I said, was a woman. She ruled unruly men. She took to herself some male subject, helplessly strong; some ‘ brute of a man,’ docile as a lamb; him she made her husband. Her people she ruled with smiles and promises, touchingly alluding, on all befitting occasions, to her helpless state. Her husband she ruled with scratches —”

“ And *hysterics*,” feelingly suggested Vyner.

“ Well, a son was born—many sons if you like; but one was her especial darling. Growing old and infirm, she declared her son should wield the sceptre of the state in her name. Councillors demurred; she cajoled; they consented. Her son became regent. At her death he continued to govern—not in his name, but in hers. The king was symbol of the woman, and reigned vicariously. When we say the king reigns, we mean the king *queens* it.”

“ Bravo!” exclaimed Vyner, chuckling in anticipation of the joke; “ and this is the

explanation of Thiers's celebrated aphorism, '*le roi REGNE et ne gouverne pas.*' ”

“ This explains also the Salic law; a curious example of the tendency of language to conceal the thoughts. A decree is enacted that no woman shall reign. That is to say, men preferred the symbol (man) to the reality (woman). They dreaded the divine right of mistresses—the autocratic absolutism of petticoats.”

“ And pray, Mr. Chamberlayne,” asked Vyner, “ how do you explain the derivation of the French verb *tuer*, to kill, from the Latin *tueor*, to preserve ?”

“ Nothing easier upon my theory of the irony of language. What is death but preservation ?”

“ Bwavo ! pwoceed. Pwove that.”

“ Is it not preservation from sickness and from sorrow, from debts, diseases, dull parties, and bores ? Death preserves us, by rescuing our frames from mortality, and wafting our souls into the bosom of immortal life. Then look at the irony of our use of the word *preserves*, *i. e.*, *places* where game is kept for indiscriminate *slaughter*; or else, *pots of luxu-*

rious sweets, destined to bring children to an untimely end."

"Why," said Vyner, "do we call a sycophant a *toady*?"

"I really don't know."

"Because his sycophancy has its source in *το δέος, fear*," replied Vyner, delighted at the joke.

"Good!" said Cecil, laughing. "I accept the derivation: the irony is perfect, as a toad is the very *last* creature to accuse of sycophancy; he spits upon the world in an unbiased and exasperating impartiality: hence the name. One of the things which has most struck me," he continued, "is the occasional urbanity of language—instance the word *question for torture*."

"Like Astyages in Herodotus," said Vyner, "politely counselling the herdsman not to desire to proceed to necessities, *ἐς τὰς ἀνάγκας*, which the man perfectly understands to mean torture. Consider, also, the *changes* which take place in words. 'Virtue' originally meant *manliness*. The Greek word *ἀρετὴ* is obviously derived from Ares (Mars), and meant *martialness*; it has now degenerated into

virtù, a taste for cameos and pictures ; and into *virtue*, woman's fairest quality, but the farthest removed from martial excellence."

" This is all vewy ingenious, pewhaps," said Tom Wincot ; " but let us go to the ladies, and hear their theowies."

They rose from table. Vyner in evidently better disposition towards Cecil than he had been since the last Horatian discussion ; Maxwell dull and stupid as ever ; Captain Heath silent and reflective.

CHAPTER XIV.

JEALOUSY.

O, my lord, beware of jealousy.
It is a green-eyed monster that doth mock
The food it eats on.

Othello.

A BRIGHT smile from Blanche welcomed Cecil, as he passed from the dining-room to the drawing-room, and walked up to the piano at which she was sitting. He thought he had never seen her look so lovely ; perhaps the remembrance of his having contemplated giving her up made him more sensible of her charms.

He took up her portfolio of loose music, and began turning over the sheets, as if seeking some particular song. She came to help him, and as she bent over the portfolio he whispered gently,—

"Can you contrive to slip away unobserved, and meet me in the shrubbery? I have something of the deepest importance to communicate."

She trembled, but it was with delight, as she whispered, "Yes."

"Plead fatigue, and retire after tea."

He then moved away, and approaching Violet asked her if she remembered the name of a certain Neapolitan canzonette, which her sister Blanche had sung the other night; and on receiving a negative sat down by her side, and entered into conversation with her.

All the rest of the evening he sat by Violet, only occasionally addressing indifferent questions to Blanche. Captain Heath seeing this, and noticing a strange agitation in Blanche's manner, which she in vain endeavoured to disguise, interpreted it according to his wishes, and sat down to a rubber at whist with great internal satisfaction.

"I have been thinking, Mr. Chamberlayne," said Meredith Vyner, shuffling the cards, "that even differences of pronunciation may assist your theory. Thus we English—a modest race—express our doubt by *scepticism*,

deriving it from $\sigma\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\psi\imath s$, deliberation. But the Scotch—a hard dogmatic race—pronounce it *shepticism*, hereby deriving it from $\sigma\kappa\hat{\eta}\psi\imath s$, intimating that a man *leans upon* his own opinion, and that his dissent from others is not a deliberation, but a walking-stick, where-with he trudges onwards to the truth.”

“ Mr. Chamberlayne,” said Mrs. Meredith Vyner, “ are we not to have some music from you this evening? Come, one of your charming Spanish songs.”

“ By the way,” said Vyner, while Cecil tuned his guitar, “ talking of Spanish songs reminds me of a passage I met in a Spanish play this morning, in which the author says,

Sin zelos amor
Es estar sin alma el cuerpo.

What say you to that, ladies? It means that love without jealousy is a body without soul. *Immane quantum discrepat!*”

“ Love has nothing whatever to do with jealousy,” said Violet; “ and so far from jealousy being the soul of love, I should say it was only the contemptible part of our nature that feels jealousy, and only the highest part of our nature that feels love.”

"No one will agree with you, my dear Violet," said Mrs. Langley Turner. "Sir Harry, it is your deal."

"Perhaps not," said Violet.

"I should vewy much like to hear Miss Violet's pwoof of her wemark. I have always wead that jealousy is inseparable fwom love; though, I confess, I never expewrienced jealousy myself."

"Nor love either—eh?" said Rose.

"That is sewere, Miss Wose! Do you pwetend that I never felt that sensation which evewy man has felt?"

"If you mean love," replied Rose, "I say, that if you have felt it, I imagine it has only been just the *beginning*."

"Twue, twue!"

"And like the charity of other people, your love has begun at home!"

"Miss Wose, Miss Wose!" said Tom Win-cot, shaking his finger at the laughing girl.

"So that, if you *have* ever been jealous," she continued, "you must have an exaggerated susceptibility."

"And why an exaggewated susceptibility?"

"Because jealous of a person no other earthly

being would think of disputing with you—your own!"

This sally produced a hearty laugh, and Tom Wincot, turning to Violet, said,—

"I'm awfaid of your sister Wose's wepawtees, so shall not pwolong the discussion ; but pway explain your pwevious weflection on jealousy."

"I mean," said Violet, "that jealousy has its source in egotism ; love, on the contrary, has its source in sympathy : hence it is that the manifestations of the one are always contemptible, of the other always noble and beautiful."

"And I," said Maxwell, his dark face lighting up with a savage expression, "think that jealousy is the most natural instinctive feeling we possess. The man or woman who is not jealous, does not know what it is to love."

"That is a mere assertion, Mr. Maxwell : can you prove it?"

"Prove it! easily. What is jealousy but a fear of losing what we hold most dearly? Look at a dog over a bone ; if you approach him he will growl, though you may have no intention

of taking away his bone: your presence is enough to excite his fear and anger. If you attempt to snatch it, though in play, then he will bite."

" You are speaking of *dogs*," said Violet, haughtily, " I spoke of *men*."

" The feeling is the same in both," retorted Maxwell.

" Yes, when men resemble dogs.—I spoke of men who possessed the higher qualities."

" Curiously enough," observed Vyner, " the Spaniards, whose jealousy is proverbial, and whose great poet, Calderon, has expressed himself in the almost diabolical manner just mentioned, these Spaniards have no word which properly means jealousy. *Zelos* is only the plural of *zelo*—zeal."

" I do not think, papa, you are quite correct," said Violet, " when you say the Spaniards are more jealous than other nations."

" They have the character, my dear."

" I am quite aware of it. But what one nation says of another is seldom accurate. If I understand jealousy, it is the sort of passion which would be *felt* quite as readily by northerns as by southerns, though it would not be

expressed in so vehement a manner ; but because one man uses a knife, when another man uses a court of law, that does not make a difference in the sentiments."

" I agree with Violet," said Captain Heath, " it seems to me that jealousy is a mean and debasing passion, whatever may be the cause which excites it. To suspect the woman whom you love and who loves you, is so degrading both to her and to you, that a man who suspects, without overwhelming evidence, must be strangely deficient in nobility of soul ; and suppose the evidence complete—suppose that she loves another, even then a noble soul arms itself with fortitude, and instead of wailing like a querulous child, accepts with courage the fate which no peevishness can avert. The love that is gone cannot be recalled by jealousy. A man should say with Othello,—

I 'll see before I doubt ; when I doubt, prove ;
And on the doubt there is no more but this—
Away at once with love and jealousy."

He looked for Blanche as he concluded this speech, but she had already retired to her room.

Cecil sang, but soon left off ; and pleading

"heartburn," caught at the advice of Tom Wincot, who assured him that a stwong cigar was the best wemedy for it, and strolled out into the grounds to smoke.

C H A P T E R XV.

THE LOVERS MEET.

And in my heart, fair angel, chaste and wise,
I love you : start not, speak not, answer not.
I love you.

HEYWOOD.—*A Woman killed with Kindness.*

IT was a lovely night. The full harvest moon shed a soft brilliance over the far-stretching meadow-lands; the sky was dotted with small patches of light fleecy cloud, and a few dim stars. All was hushed in that repose which lends a solemn grandeur to a night-scene, when the sky, the stars, the silence—things suggestive of infinity—become the objects of contemplation.

Cecil was not one to remain indifferent to such a scene: his painter's eye and poet's heart were equally open to its mild splendour. The

tall trees standing dark against the sky, and the dim outline of the woody heights around, no more escaped his notice, than the picturesquely grouped cattle, one of which, a dun cow, with large white face and chest, stood motionless amidst her recumbent companions.

Although he could not resist the first burst of admiration, Cecil was in no mood to luxuriate in the poetry of such a scene, as he would have done at any other time; but, striking into the thick and shadowy shrubbery, delicately chequered with interspaces of moonlight, he began to consider the object of this nocturnal ramble.

It would be difficult to explain the motive which impelled him to make this assignation. It was one of the sudden inspirations of passion, which defeat whole months of calculated prudence. Nothing could have been more opposed to his calculations than anything like an express declaration, until he had ascertained the truth of what Captain Heath had asserted. And although he rose from the table with the resolution to be on his guard, and to watch closely the state of affairs, his first act, as we have seen, was one of consummate

imprudence—one which inextricably entangled him in the very net from which he was anxious to keep away. Now, upon Captain Heath's view of his character, this was little less than madness—in short, it was unintelligible. But it is intelligible enough upon a more comprehensive view of human character; as every one will acknowledge who has ever stood beside the girl he loves, in a room full of people—the very restraint of the place sharpens desire, and makes the timid bold. Hence one reason why so many more declarations are made in ball-rooms, and at parties, than in *tête-à-têtes*.

Certain it is that Cecil, standing beside Blanche looking over the same portfolio, their hands occasionally touching, their eyes occasionally meeting, was in no condition to listen to the dictates of reason. A tumult of desire beat at his heart. He was standing within that atmosphere (if I may use the word) which surrounds the beloved, and which, as by a magnetic power, inconceivably stirs the voluptuousness latent in every soul. He was within the halo which encircled her, and was dazzled by its lustre. Irresistibly urged by his passion

to call this lovely creature his own, he could not forego bringing things to a crisis ; and he made the assignation. Her consent enchanted him. He was in a fever of impatience for her to retire. He cursed the lagging time for its slowness ; and, with a thrill of delight, found himself in the open air, about to hear from Blanche's own lips that which her eyes had so frequently expressed.

In a few minutes, all this impatience and delight subsided. He had gained his point. Blanche had consented to meet him ; and he had contrived to come to the rendezvous without awaking any suspicion. Now, for the first time, he began to consider seriously the object of that meeting. He was calm now ; and grew calmer the more he pondered.

“ What an ass I have been ! ” he thought. “ What the devil could induce me to forget myself so far ? She will come, expecting to hear me declare myself. But I can’t marry her. I can’t offer her beggary as a return for her love. If Heath should have told the truth. D—n it, he can’t be such an unfeeling egotist as not to make *some* provision for his children ! No, no ; I’ll not believe *that*. A

few thousands he must in common decency have set aside, or he would never be able to look honest men in the face. Besides, Vyner doesn't appear to be particularly selfish. However, it *may* be true; and if so —

“ Can I invent something of importance to communicate instead of my love? Let me see. That will look so odd—to make an assignation for any other purpose than *the* one! But she doesn't come. Can she be hesitating? I wish her fears would get the better!

“ She won't come. That will release me from the difficulty. It is the best thing that could happen.

“ I see a light in her room. What is she doing? Struggling with herself perhaps; or perhaps waiting till the coast is clear. D—n the cigar, out again!”

Upon what slight foundations sometimes hang the most important events!

That is rather a profound remark; not positively new, perhaps, but singularly true. It has escaped from my pen, and as a pencil mark of approbation is sure to be made against it in every copy in every circulating library, why should I hesitate to let it go forth?

A fine essay might be written entitled, "The Philosophy of Life, as collected from the *marked passages* in modern novels." And I offer the essayist, the remark above, as his opening aphorism.

But I digress.

The situation which suggested the foregoing aphorism was curious enough to warrant my writing it; for had Blanche appeared at the rendezvous at this time, or a few minutes earlier, it is most likely, from the frame of mind in which her lover then was, that he would have made some shuffling excuse or other, and declared anything to her but his love. But she hesitated. With a coyness natural to the sex, she shrunk back from that which she most desired. Nothing would have given her greater pleasure than to hear Cecil swear he loved her, and yet she trembled at the idea of meeting him to hear it said.

She kept him waiting half an hour.

Whoever has been accustomed to analyze his own feelings, will at once foresee that Cecil, after coming to the determination that he had acted with consummate folly in making the assignation, now began to get uneasy at the

idea of her not keeping it. Obstacles irritate desires. If "the course of true love" does not "run smooth," so much the deeper will it run. Cecil, willing enough to blame himself for his rashness, now began to feel piqued at her indifference. Ten minutes before, the sight of her coming from the house would have been painful; now he was irritated by her absence. He was several times on the point of sulkily going back to the drawing-room; but the thought "if she should come" arrested him.

She came at last, and his heart leapt as he beheld her.

"Have I kept you long?" she asked.

"Every minute away from you is an hour. But you are with me now," he replied, as he folded her to his breast and kissed her burning lips.

Having expressed what was in their hearts by this long eloquent embrace, he twined his arm around her waist, clasping her hand in his, walked slowly with her to the river-side.

While they are thus lovingly employed, I wish to make one remark on the superiority of actions to words. Here were two lovers morally certain of each other's affection, but

wanting the confirmation of an oath. They met for the express purpose of saying, in good set terms, that which only wanted the ratification of words; and instead of saying anything on the subject they allowed a kiss—and very eloquent such kisses are—to settle the matter. What could they have said which would have so well expressed it?

Although they walked down to the river, and sat upon the trunk of a fallen tree to admire the shimmer of moonlight upon the gently running stream, and the cool, crisp, delightful sound of the water as it dashed over the huge stones that formed a weir, and then fell over in guise of a little waterfall, they made no allusion to the “important communication” which had drawn them both out. They had too much to talk about. They had to confess when it was their love began, and to vow that it would never end. They had the most charming confidences to make respecting what had been done and said by each, and what each had felt thereat; confidences which, though full of “eloquent music” to them, may very well be spared here.

Nor did they much admire the river by

moonlight, in spite of its brilliant tracks of light, and dusky patches of shade thrown from the overhanging trees ; hand clasped in hand, they looked into each other's eyes, from which no landscape in the world could have seduced them.

Oh, what exquisite bliss was crowded into that brief hour ! How their pulses throbbed, and their hearts bounded ! How their souls looked from out their eyes as if to plunge into an indissoluble union ! A strange fire burnt in their veins, and made them almost faint with pleasure too intense for mortal endurance. He crushed her hand in his with almost savage fury, and she returned the pressure.

Love ! divine delirium, exquisite pain ! rich as thou art in rapture, potent as thou art o'er the witcheries of moments which reveal to mortal sense some glimpses of immortal bliss, thou hast no such *second* moment as that which succeeds the first avowal of two passionate natures. Other joys thou hast in store, but no repetition of this one thrilling estasy.

Love has its virginity—its bloom—its first, but perishable melody, which sounds but once, and then is heard no more. This melody was

now sounding in their hearts, as, seated on that fallen trunk, they heeded the world no more than the moonlit stream which glided at their feet. One hour of intense, suffocating, overwhelming rapture did they pass together ; an hour never to be forgottten ; an hour worth a life.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DISCOVERY.

How silver sweet sound lovers' tongues by night!
Like softest music to attending ears.

Romeo and Juliet.

LEAVING the lovers to their rapture, let us glance in at the warm drawing-room, and at the philosophic whist-table: Captain Heath is standing with his back to the fire; Tom Win-cot having “cut in” in his place; Violet and Rose are knitting.

“Blanche, my dear,” said Meredith Vyner.

“She has gone to bed, papa,” said Rose.

“Oh, very well. Is Mr. Chamberlayne come in? No! Our deal, is it not?”

This little fragment of the conversation suddenly made Captain Heath suspicious. He was before aware that Blanche and Cecil were

absent ; but he had not before coupled their two exits in his own mind, so as to draw therefrom a conclusion. “Can they have arranged this ?” flashed across his brain. He quietly left the room, took his hat, and walked out. Though by no means of a jealous disposition, he could not help commenting in his own mind on a hundred insignificant traits of what appeared to him ! Blanche’s passion for Cecil, and the conclusion he drew from them was, that she not only loved him, but studiously concealed her love. As he said, with him “once to be in doubt was once to be resolved ;” his was none of that petty, querulous jealousy, irritated at self-inflicted tortures, and yet too weak to finish them by making doubts certainties. Like a brave man, as he was, he paused not an instant in endeavouring to arrive at certitude in all things. Instead, therefore, of worrying himself with doubts and arguments, with hopes that she might not love Cecil, and fears that she did, he determined to settle the point, and place it beyond a doubt.

He had not gone far when his quick ears detected the indistinct murmur of conversation. He paused for a moment, and leaned against a

tree. A cold perspiration stood on his brow; a feeling of sickness, which he could not subdue, arrested him; the first spasm of despair clutched his heart, as the murmur fell upon his ear, and told him that what he had suspected was the truth.

That he might not be mistaken; that he might not act without thorough conviction, he approached still closer to the spot from whence the murmur came, and there he saw the lovers seated under the dark branches of a gigantic larch, which served to make Blanche's white dress more visible.

Little did that happy pair suspect with what heartbroken interest they were contemplated. They pressed each other's hand, and repeated endless variations of that phrase, of all phrases most dulcet to mortal ear, "I love you;" and if they thought at all, thought themselves forgotten by the world they so entirely forgot.

In the midst of their dreamy bliss, a low, half-stifled sob startled them. They sprang up. She clung tremblingly to him. He looked eagerly around, piercing through the shadowy pathways with a glance of terror. He could

discover nothing. All was silent. Nothing stirred.

“ Did you not hear a groan ? ” he whispered.

“ It seemed like a sob.”

“ All is silent. I see no one. Listen ! ”

They listened for some seconds ; not a sound was audible.

“ It must have been fancy,” he said.

“ No ; I heard it too plainly.”

“ Perhaps it was a noise made by one of the cows yonder.”

“ At any rate, let us go in. Do you return by the shrubbery. I will go round by the garden.”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SACRIFICE.

I know I love in vain—strive against hope—
Yet in this captious and intenible sieve
I still pour out the waters of my love,
And lack not to love still.

SHAKSPEARE.—*All's Well that Ends Well.*

WHEN Cecil re-entered the drawing-room, he found it exactly as he had left it, except that Tom Wincot was playing whist in place of Captain Heath, who stood leaning against the mantelpiece, with his left hand caressing the shaggy head of Shot; that favoured animal stood with his fore-paws resting on the fender, and his face raised inquiringly, as if to ascertain the reason of his friend's paleness. Pale, indeed, was the handsome face of that brave, sorrowing man; and the keen sympathy

of the hound had read in its rigidity and calmness the signs of suffering, which escaped the notice of every one else. True it is that the captain somewhat shielded his face from observation by, with his left hand, twirling his moustache, a practice too habitual with him to call forth any remark.

Cecil was in such a state of excitement, that the girls remarked it. He joked, laughed joyously at the most trivial observation, sang with prodigious fervour, and declared there was nothing like a moonlight ramble for the cure of the heartburn.

“ It seems to have been the heart-*ache*,” said Rose, “ by the exuberance of your spirits after the cure.”

Cecil looked up, and seeing her saucy smile, and her eyes swimming in laughter, knew that she was not serious, so he asked what should make his heart ache ?

“ Ay, ay,” said Vyner, “ what, indeed? *quo beatus vulnere?* If you have discovered, let us hear it.”

“ Yes, yes, tell us his secret by all means,” said Wincot, throwing down his last card; “ two by honours, thwee by twicks—game—

that makes a single, a tweble, and the wub : six points ! ”

“ No, no,” said Rose, shaking her head, “ I shall not say it now.”

“ Pray, don’t spare me,” said Cecil. “ I am quite sure it was something satirical.”

“ It was ; but I don’t choose to say it now.”

Captain Heath continued to pat Shot’s head ; but he neither looked up, nor joined in the conversation. Cecil, who had several times endeavoured in vain to make him talk, left him at last to his reflections, whispering to Rose,—

“ He is too grave for our frivolities.”

Cecil’s excitement continued all the evening. He slept well that night, cradled in enchanting dreams.

What Blanche felt as she stole up to her own room, rapidly undressed herself, and crept into bed, I leave to my young and pretty readers to conjecture.

The next evening, though they had several brief snatches of *tête-à-tête* during the day, our lovers were again to indulge in a moonlight ramble, hoping no doubt for a repetition of the first. Blanche early pleaded fatigue, and

declared her intention of soon retiring for the night.

"Don't go to bed, as you did last night," said Captain Heath; "if you are weary, take a turn with me in the shrubbery: there is a lovely moon."

Blanche coloured deeply, and kept her eyes fixed upon her work. Cecil looked at him, as if to read the hidden meaning of those words.

It was a moment of suspense. The entrance of tea enabled them to hide their emotions; and, by occasioning a change of seats, brought the captain close to Blanche.

"How imprudent you are!" he whispered. "Accept my offer of a walk, and *he* shall accompany us; when we are out of sight, I will leave you; but by all three going out together, no suspicion will be raised."

Blanche trembled and blushed, but made no answer. The discovery of her last night's interview was implied in what he said; and with that was implied this other fact, which then for the first time flashed across her mind: Captain Heath loved her. It was his sob which had startled them.

If, amidst her compassion for his unhappy

love, there was mixed some secret gratification at having excited that passion, no one will speak harshly of her; it would be too much to expect human nature should be insensible to the flattery of affection. But flattered as she was by the discovery, she was also sensible of the noble delicacy of his conduct in the matter; and when she raised her humid eyes to look her thanks, it was with a severe pang that she noticed the alteration in his appearance. One night had added ten years to his age.

“Miss Blanche and I are going to stroll out and enjoy the harvest moon,” said Captain Heath about half an hour afterwards to Cecil, “will you join us?”

Cecil looked amazed, and felt inclined to throw him out of the window for his proposition, but Blanche made a sign to him to accept, and he accepted.

“And I suppose I am not to come?” said Rose.

“Certainly—if you like,” replied the captain.

“No, you may go without me. *Three* is company, and two is none,” she said, parodying

the popular phrase, "and if I came, we should be two and two."

The captain did not press the matter, but offering Blanche his arm led her out, followed by Cecil, somewhat sulky, and not at all comprehending the affair.

"There, now I surrender her to your charge," said the captain, when they were within hearing of the waterfall, "having saved your meeting from suspicion. Continue your walk, I am here as sentinel."

He seated himself upon a gate with all the quietness of the most ordinary transaction. Cecil, who was a good deal annoyed at this interference of a third party, made no reply; he was not even grateful for the service rendered.

Blanche, who knew what it must have cost the captain thus to sacrifice his own feelings, and think only of her safety, took his hand in hers, and kissed it silently. A tear fell on it as he withdrew it.

"Make the most of your time," he said.

In another instant he was alone.

The intense gratification he felt in making this sacrifice, will be appreciated by those

who know what it is to forego their own claims in favour of another—to trample on their own egotisms, and act as their conscience approves. The mixture of pain only added to the intensity of the delight; as perhaps no enjoyment is ever perfect, physical or moral, without the keen sense of pain thrown in as a zest.

His greatest hope in life was gone, and yet he sat there not torn by miserable jealousy, but warmed with the glow of self-sacrifice. And this is the meaning of virtue being its own reward: had he acted with only ordinary meanness, had he done what hundreds and hundreds would have done in his place, he would have suffered tortures all the more horrible, because unavailing. Instead of that, he looked courageously into the grim countenance of misfortune, saw that he was not loved, that another had received the heart he coveted, and having seen that, he determined to stifle the mighty hunger of his heart, to give up all futile hope, and to devote himself to her happiness in such ways as he could forward it.

The lovers, with the selfishness of lovers,

had speedily forgotten him and every one else. But although they sat upon the self-same tree ; although they clasped each other by the hand, and looked into each other's eyes, their interview was cold compared with that of the night before.

One reason might be, that on that night they talked of love ; on this, they talked of marriage. Cecil explained to her the state of his affairs, and asked her if she could leave her present luxurious home to share his humbler one.

This question is *always* asked under those circumstances ; though the questioner knows very well that it is pre-eminently superfluous, and that there is but one possible answer, conveyed in a look and a kiss. The answer, however, is agreeable enough to warrant the question ; is it not ?

Lovers are singularly insincere with each other, and play at doubts—and sometimes very offensive doubts—with an air of earnestness which would imply considerable duplicity, were it not one of the *instincts* of passion. The truth is, Love loves to hear the assurance of love ; and to hear this assurance, of

which it is already sure, it pretends to have doubts, merely to have them removed.

Let us forgive Cecil his insincerity in asking Blanche that question ; and let us pass over in silence all the others which he asked, and to which he got the same sweet answer. They remained there a long while ; at least it seemed so to their sentinel ; to them it seemed too brief. But they rose at a signal he gave ; and when they came up with him, he said, gravely, “ Mr. Chamberlayne, I trust you will take what I am about to say with the same candour as I say it. I am anxious to serve you, not to lecture you. Although, therefore, I know nothing of the reasons which you may have for keeping your mutual attachment secret, I am strongly of opinion that the best and wisest thing you can do is to make it public at once. Ask her father’s consent, but do not be discovered in clandestine meetings. If you desire it, I will break the matter to Mr. Vyner, and plead your cause to the best of my ability.”

This was received in complete silence. Cecil was alarmed ; Blanche kept her eyes fixed on him.

"Reflect upon it," added the captain, as he led the way to the house.

Some inexplicable foreboding damped Cecil's spirits at the idea of declaring to her father his affection for Blanche; and this foreboding was realized in the course of the evening by Vyner casually mentioning, in his hearing, that which Captain Heath had already informed him of, respecting the portionless state of the girls.

"So I tell my girls," he added, "they must keep strict guard over their hearts, to be sure they give them to no beggar. The more so" (here he looked at Cecil) "because, if they felt inclined to make fools of themselves, I certainly should not allow them to do so."

The thought occurred to Cecil, "Can Heath have betrayed me? and is that speech levelled at me?"

He looked at the captain to read the treachery on his brow; but that calm, honest face triumphantly withstood the scrutiny; and Cecil no longer accused him.

The truth is, Vyner did suspect that Cecil was paying too great attention to Blanche, and had levelled his speech at him, imagining that the hint would be taken. Since that

morning when the most splendid discovery on the Horatian metres ever made, had been so ill appreciated, Vyner ceased to regard him with the same pleasure as before ; and in criticizing his actions, observed his attentions to Blanche.

“ You see how fatal your counsel would be,” whispered Cecil to the captain, as he took his candle and retired for the night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CECIL IN HIS TRUE COLOURS.

CECIL reached his own room with savage sullenness. He had asked Blanche if she would share his poverty, and was delighted with her answer; but—strange paradox—he had never seriously thought of sharing it with her; and now his perplexity was how to escape from his present dilemma. To marry upon his means was impossible; impossible also to think of giving her up. To trust for one moment to Vyner's liberality, he felt was futile; the mere avowal of his attachment would be sufficient to close the doors against him for ever.

Angrily he paced up and down his room, striving in vain to detect some means of ex-

tricating himself. A fierce and contemptible struggle between passion and interest agitated him : sometimes love prevailed, and sometimes prudence.

In the midst of this self-struggle Captain Heath came in.

“I have come to speak with you,” he said, “and trust you will regard me as Blanche’s elder brother, anxious to befriend you, but still more anxious to protect her. Will you treat with me on those terms ?”

“Certainly. You have already discovered our secret—how, I know not—and there can be no impropriety in consulting with you ; I have perfect confidence in you.”

“Your confidence is deserved. Now, tell me ; you have yourself heard from Vyner what I told you in the billiard-room. I told it you, because I saw in what direction you turned your eyes, and wished you to have a clear comprehension of the family affairs. Had only your fancy been touched, my warning would have been in time ; as it was, your heart was engaged, and my warning came too

late. I do not repent it, however, the more so as it served to show me the strength of your love. Pardon me for having misjudged you," holding out his hand, "but I imagined that what I said respecting Blanche's poverty would at once put a stop to your attentions. You have shown me how ill I judged you. Will this confession, while it convinces you of my sincerity, also purchase my forgiveness?"

Cecil coloured with shame, and pressed the outstretched hand in silence.

"Now to your affairs. You wish to keep your attachment a secret. For what purpose? How can it avail you? It must be discovered, and then you will have lost all the advantages of openness."

“But what am I to do? Vyner will never give his consent. I am too poor.”

“If I may ask without indiscretion — what is your income? What are your prospects?”

“My income is the interest of four thousand pounds; my prospects are vague enough. I have some talent. Painting and literature are

open to me; but I should prefer diplomacy."

" You cannot marry on such prospects."

" No, indeed! But what am I to do?"

" I have but one suggestion to make. My brother is chairman to a railway now in course of formation. The secretaryship is worth four hundred a year. If you will accept of it, I think, by exerting myself, I could secure it for you."

" I am much obliged to you," replied Cecil, coldly; " but that is not at all in my way."

" You refuse?" said the astonished captain.
" Refuse four hundred a year?"

" Remember I am a gentleman's son," he said, haughtily, " and you will appreciate my refusal."

" Upon my word, I do appreciate it, and at its real value! Here, I offer you what certainly I should never have thought of offering you, had it not been for *her* sake, a situation which thousands of gentlemen's sons would be delighted to accept, a situation which, with your own small property, will

enable you to live in decent comfort, and you refuse it?"

"Really, your officious indignation," said Cecil, getting angry in his turn, "is somewhat out of place. You meant kindly, I dare say; but once for all allow me to observe, that I neither am, nor ever will be, a *quill-driver*."

"Not even for *her* sake?"

"No; for no one will I degrade myself in my own eyes. If I must work, it shall be in some gentlemanly department. I will either paint or write for my livelihood, when I *am* condemned to gain it."

"And you pretend to love her?"

"I do; but I am sure she would be the first to dissuade me from such a degradation as you propose. She has given her heart to a gentleman, and not to a clerk."

"Bah! you talk in the language of a century ago. The pride which was then, perhaps, excusable, becomes simply ridiculous now-a-days."

"And you, captain, are using language which, if it continues, I shall demand an explanation——"

“ You threaten ?”

“ I have no wish to do so ; but the tone you adopt is such as I can no longer permit.”

“ Well, I did not come to quarrel with you, so will abstain from criticism. Only, let me ask you what you propose to do ?”

“ I propose nothing, I am totally at a loss.”

“ You positively refuse my offer ?”

“ Positively.”

“ You do not think of marrying upon your present means ?”

“ Decidedly not.”

“ Then you have but one course : to relinquish your claim.”

“ I have thought of that.”

As this confession escaped him, a sudden light shone in the captain’s eyes, a sparkle of unexpected triumph which did not escape his rival.

It was a double betrayal. Cecil betrayed his selfishness—the captain his love.

“ I have thought of it,” he repeated, “ but I cannot make the sacrifice. I love her too much.

It may be selfish, but I feel it impossible to give her up."

He watched the captain's countenance with malicious joy as he spoke this, conscious that every phrase was an arrow to pierce his rival's heart.

"But you must decide either to marry her, or——"

"Or," interrupted Cecil, with a sneer, "relinquish my claim in your favour, eh?"

Captain Heath shook slightly, and then fixing his full gaze upon Cecil, said quietly,—

"How little you know the man whom you so wantonly insult!"

He left the room.

"*He* loves her," said Cecil to himself, bewildered at the discovery. "Loves her! What, then, is the meaning of his conduct? He acts as sentinel during our interview—takes upon himself to break the matter to her father, if I wish it—offers me a situation to enable me to marry. Oh! it is preposterous! I should be a fool indeed to believe it! Loves her! loves her and assists a rival! There is some cunning scheme in all this. I

cannot divine *what* it is, but I am certain *that* it is.

“ He loves her. Let me see: first, he endeavours to frighten me away by explaining the state of Vyner’s affairs. That is intelligible enough: he wanted me to take the alarm and decamp. Failing in that, he suddenly changes tactics, and officiously thrusts himself between us as a patron and protector. The scoundrel !”

Yes, scoundrel! for doing that which, in its simple heroism, so distances all ordinary actions, that it looks like a meanness. Thus are men judged. If a man perform some act of ostentatious grandeur, the town will ring with loud applause; but unless the act is striking, and the motive clearly intelligible, he is sure to be maligned. Men only credit in others the kind of virtue they feel capable of themselves; as Sallust says of the readers of history,—“ ubi de magnâ virtute et gloriâ bonorum memores quæ sibi quisque facilia factu putat, æquo animo accipit; supra ea veluti ficta pro falsis dicit.”

Captain Heath’s self-sacrifice was one de-

manding the greatest moral fortitude, precisely because it had no adventitious aid from the anticipation of applause; it required an immense effort, and could have no éclat. It was a victory to be gained after a fierce combat, and to be followed by no flourish of trumpets. Strength of mind gained the victory; and the pleasure derived from all exercise of strength was the reward.

Although I uphold such actions as heroic, as springing from true moral greatness, and worthy of our deepest reverence, yet it must not be supposed that there is anything marvellous in this self-abnegation. The followers of De la Rochefoucauld might find out egotism even here, if they used their cold scalpel aright. They might say Captain Heath was convinced that Blanche loved another, and all his efforts to prevent that would be useless. Finding himself thus completely excluded from all hope of obtaining her, he made up his mind to the defeat, and instead of allowing himself to be made miserable by idle regrets and idler jealousy, he gave himself the delight of assisting her.

To Cecil, however, who was certainly so incapable of such conduct as to be incapable of believing it, the captain was evidently a scoundrel, whom he would first outwit and then challenge.

To outwit him, he determined to carry Blanche off.

Cecil, vacillating between his passion and his prudence, between his love for Blanche and his horror at poverty, suddenly lost all hesitation, the instant he was aware of a rival. The selfishness which had made him unwilling to encounter poverty, to rush into the great battle of life, there to gain a footing for the sake of Blanche, now made him ready to run all risks for the sake of triumphing over a rival. No suggestions assailed him now respecting the imprudence of marriage; no horrors at bringing a family into the world without the means of properly providing for them; no thought of what *she* would suffer now disturbed him, as it had before. And why? because it then was only a mask under which he hid the face of his own selfishness from himself. The one-absorbing thought was how to quickly

call her his; how to irrevocably bind her to him.

“ He thinks to dupe me, does he ? He shall find out his mistake. I will this instant go to her, and arrange our flight.”

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PERILS OF ONE NIGHT.

Words that weep, and tears that speak.

COWLEY.

BLANCHE's bed-room formed the angle of the right wing at the back of the Hall. Her window looked upon the terrace. Between the right wing and the offices ran an arcade, as a sort of a connecting link. The top of this arcade formed an open gallery with heavy balustrades, and paved with dark iron-grey tiles. A small side-door opened on to it from the bed-room; and frequently, in summer, did Blanche sit out in this gallery to enjoy the cool night-air, or, leaning against the balustrade, gazed at the heavy curtain of clouds,—

“ While the rare stars rush'd thro' them dim and fast.”

At the end of the interior of the arcade was a niche, in which were generally kept some of the girl's gardening tools, and a slight ladder which they used.

Blanche was still dressed, as the light in her bed-room told Cecil, who had stolen out in pursuance of the resolution recorded in the last chapter. She was seated on the side of her bed in an attitude of delicious reverie, her head slightly drooping, her hands carelessly fallen on her lap, when the sound of a pebble striking against the window-pane startled her. Again that sound—and again! She rose and went to the window. The sky was overcast, and the night was dark, but after a few seconds she recognised Cecil, and opened the window.

“Are you dressed, dearest?”

“Yes.”

“Then come out into the gallery. I want to speak to you. I can get up by the ladder.”

“Very well, but be careful.”

She closed the window, and stepped out. He placed the top of the ladder against the pediment of the arcade and quickly ascended.

They rushed into each other's arms of course. Lovers always do that directly they are together, no matter what important business brings them there.

"Blanche, my beloved, are you willing to share my fate, whatever that may be?"

"Have you run all this risk to ask me that?" she said, reproachfully.

"No; but I must ask it you—and in saddest seriousness—before I speak further."

Her lips sought his, and pressed them ardently.

"Our secret is discovered—your father even suspects it—we must fly—will you be mine?—Hush! what is that?—hush!—I heard a door shut.—Hark! yes, a footstep—do you not hear it?—a hurried step.—It comes this way—good God! what shall we do?"

Blanche trembled with fright as the heavy sounds of an approaching step smote upon her ears; but, with a sudden inspiration, she dragged Cecil into her room, and opening her window leaned out as if star-gazing, though the sky was starless. At length the sharp ring of the footsteps upon the stone terrace

was heard, and a male figure was dimly visible. It came right opposite the window.

“ Blanche ! not yet in bed ? ” said Captain Heath ; “ and breathing the autumnal night-air too ? ”

She shook slightly, but answered, “ Yes. The night-air cools me.”

Cecil was greatly agitated, but held his breath and listened. Nothing more was said for some seconds ; at last Blanche asked him what brought him out so late.

“ Inability to remain in doors. I have just had an interview with *him*, which has greatly agitated me. He shewed himself selfish, foolish, and contemptible.”

Cecil was on the point of starting up, but restrained himself on remembering where he was. Blanche was hurt, and replied, “ Silence on that subject. Remember you are speaking of one who is to be my husband.”

“ God forbid ! ” he exclaimed.

She closed the discussion by shutting her window.

He moved away ; but had not taken four steps when the ladder caught his eye. The

position of the ladder, coupled with Blanche at the open window, still dressed, at that hour of the night, at once convinced him that an elopement was meditated. A sick faintness overcame him for a moment; but it was only for a moment. He rallied immediately, and taking the ladder on his shoulder, carried it off.

Willing as he was to assist his rival in every honourable way, he could not, after that evening's conversation with him, think of allowing an elopement, which must not only deprive them of any chance of assistance from her father, but also, by an unseemly precipitation, plunge them both into a difficulty it was his care, as Blanche's protector, to save them from. Having carried away their ladder, he then proceeded to the lodge-gates to see if a post-chaise was in waiting.

Meanwhile, the lovers had recovered from their agitation, and were arranging their plans of escape for the following night. The first tremor of modesty Blanche felt, on becoming aware that she had introduced Cecil into her bed-room, was completely set aside—the more

so as, with a delicacy which often distinguished this weak, selfish, but still in many respects, admirable man, Cecil kept himself at a distance from her, and though holding her hand, did not even raise it to his lips. By that mute language which is more eloquent than words, he had assured her that the situation only increased his respect, and that nothing should make him take a base advantage of her momentary forgetfulness.

There was something deeply interesting and even touching in the situation of these two lovers. Shut up in a bed-room with him at midnight, she was as sacred in his eyes as she would have been in broad daylight, and surrounded by friends. She felt her security ; and this gave a frankness and tenderness to her manner, which plainly spoke her thanks.

He felt also the charm of the situation, but with the charm, the danger, and therefore dared not keep his eyes from her, dared not look upon the bed or toilet-table, and strove by looking only at her to forget the place.

Modest and respectful as his attitude was,

there was an exquisite feeling engendered by that situation which he had never felt before, and which those will comprehend who have trembled with secret pleasure at the delicious nothings—an accidental touch of the hand—the contact of a ringlet against the cheek—nothings which love invests with an incomparable charm. It is like a coy lingering at the gates of paradise, whose splendour the soul anticipates with delicious awe.

But the time fled rapidly, and the first cold streaks of dawn, struggling with the faint starlight, warned him that he must depart, ere it seemed to him that he had said all there was to say. Repeating every detail of their plan once more, they arose. He timidly offered her his lips, as begging but not demanding a kiss, and she threw herself into his arms. There was gratitude in her embrace, though she knew not for what. Her innocence concealed from her the perilous situation she had gone through; but her instinct told her confusedly that she had been spared. He pressed her closer to him, and felt a thousand-fold repaid.

She opened the door, and they stepped out into the gallery. Horror stiffened their features as they missed the ladder. "Gone! gone!" he hoarsely whispered. "Then, we are lost. It's that meddler, Heath! . . . He knew I was in your room, and he took that method of . . . But I'll be revenged. The scoundrel!"

Blanche was too terrified to weep; she did nothing but wring her hands piteously.

What was to be done? The arcade was too high to allow him to drop; and yet there seemed to be no other mode of escape possible.

It was a moment of horrible suspense.

"Heath loves you, Blanche," he said presently, with a certain fierceness in his tone.

"I know it," she said, sadly.

There was a pause. She watched his countenance with anxiety: angry passions seemed drifting over his soul like the clouds over a stormy sky; and she, not understanding the tortures of jealousy, of hate, of revenge, of fierce resolutions as quickly chased away as formed,

which then agitated him, looked with trembling at his distorted face.

“ By God ! ” he suddenly exclaimed, “ I will triumph yet.”

Then seizing her by the waist, he carried her back again into the room.

“ Cecil, Cecil,” she said, “ let me go. What do you mean ? Cecil, you alarm me—set me down.”

He tried to stop her mouth, but she struggled in his grasp, from which she at length freed herself.

“ Blanche,” he said, “ we are betrayed. We shall be separated for ever—for ever ! There is but one way to prevent it, but one way to defy them.”

He approached her, but she eluded his grasp, and said : “ Oh ! dearest, dearest Cecil ! do not . . . do not outrage the memory of this night, hitherto so sacred . . . do not lower me in your eyes, and my own.”

“ It must . . . it shall be . . . ”

“ No, no ; do not say it ! ”

“ It is our only hope,” he said, as he again clasped her in his arms.

“Cecil, Cecil, I am yours . . . yours only will I be . . . can you doubt it? . . . but, oh! leave me now! leave me! leave me!”

She sank at his feet, raising her hands imploringly, and wept.

He was touched. The sight of this lovely girl, thus passionate in her sorrow, kneeling at his feet and imploring his pity, was more than he could withstand. All the wild passion and gross instincts which had been roused, were now calmed again with the rapidity which is usual in such moments of delirious excitement, when the soul seems not only susceptible of every influence bad or good, but also susceptible of the most violent and rapid changes.

He threw himself upon a chair, and bade her rise.

“God bless you! God bless you for that word!” she sobbed. “There spoke my own Cecil.”

He was silent and humiliated. The flaring light of the candles just expiring in the socket, told her that they would soon be in darkness; and she shuddered at the thought, though not daring to disturb the sullen medi-

tation in which he was indulging, by any prayer to him to depart. Each time the wayward light in its capricious action seemed on the point of being extinguished, a thrill of horror ran over her. The returning brightness brought returning courage.

Silent he sat,

Still as any stone,

His eyes fixed on the floor, a prey to a sort of remorseful stupid anger, not only at having been foiled, but at finding himself helpless in the dilemma.

One of the candles went out. Only a feeble vacillating glimmer was shed by the other ; but it was enough to show him that Blanche had fainted. The emotions of the night had so enfeebled her, that the terror of approaching darkness made her senseless.

“ I have killed her ! ” was the horrible thought that presented itself to his mind. He sprang forwards, raised her in his arms, and looked eagerly into her ashy-pale countenance.

The second candle went out, and left them in obscurity, which the delicate tints of early

morning peering through the window-curtains scarcely lessened.

He dragged her out into the gallery, where in a few minutes the keen air of morning revived her. On coming to herself, she saw the cold grey sky above, and Cecil's anxious face bending down to catch the first glimpse of returning life. A sweet sigh burst from her, as she closed her eyes again, and leaned her head upon his shoulder. It was like awaking from a nightmare!

In a few minutes, she was sufficiently revived to be able to stand. Not a word passed; but her eyes were most eloquent, as in mute thankfulness she fixed them on his agitated face.

Perhaps in all the emotions of that eventful night, there had been none which rivalled in peculiar and indescribable delight their present sense of subsided agitation and terror. A heavenly calmness had descended upon their spirits. It was like the hushed stillness which succeeds a storm, when the only sound is that of the gentle dripping of rain-drops from the leaves. Their feelings were in harmony with the scene. The twittering of a few early

birds made them sensible of the deep repose and quiet of the hour ; and the pale streaks of golden light, mixed with the heavy clouds which during the night had lowered from the sky, not inaptly represented the streaks of light which in their own souls drove away the clouds of darkness and tempest.

While in the mute enjoyment of this scene, they were suddenly alarmed by the appearance of a man emerging from the wood. Another glance assured them it was Captain Heath ; and to avoid being seen they returned to the bed-room.

“ Heath is still prowling about,” said Cecil to her. “ No doubt on the watch ; so if any means could be devised of my descending on to the terrace, he would be certain to see me. I must make a bold venture, and go through the house. At this early hour, no one can be awake. I will take off my boots, and creep noiselessly along.”

Captain Heath was returning, trying to persuade himself that the ladder placed against the arcade was purely accidental. No traces of a post-chaise were to be seen ; and, after all,

was not an elopement most improbable, when his interview with Cecil was kept in mind ?

It may seem strange, that one capable of assisting his rival should feel so hurt at the thought of an elopement. Yet the shock had almost unmanned him. He roamed about, like a criminal in a condemned cell, endeavouring to persuade himself that his doom cannot be executed—that a reprieve must come. The truth is—and let it not impeach his heroism, but rather enhance it, by showing how great was his sacrifice—he had not fortitude enough to bear the blow when it fell. He had made up his mind to see his beloved the wife of another ; but he had not made up his mind to see it so suddenly. Resigned to his fate, he had not imagined his doom so near its execution. Perhaps, in the secret recesses of his soul, there were vague, unexpressed hopes that *something* might occur to prevent the marriage—that Vyner would refuse—that Cecil would repent. In short, the vicissitudes of life opened to him a hope ; and faint as that hope might be, we know at what reeds the sinking man will snatch.

Rather than believe in an elopement, he made up his mind to the position of the ladder being an accident; and resolved at length to seek his couch in sleep to forget the troubles of his soul.

His bedroom was situated at the corner of a corridor, at the end of which was Blanche's room. His hand was upon the lock, and the door ajar, when, emerging from the corridor, Cecil turned the corner and came full upon his rival.

What a look was that darted from each startled and indignant face at this encounter! Both were speechless—both deadly pale; the muscles frightfully rigid; the eyes—oh! who shall describe the lightnings of their terrible eyes, glaring at each other like famished jaguars!

It was but a look, and they separated.

In that look of horror, of rage, of triumph, and despair, Cecil concentrated all the hate and jealousy he felt, as well as all the triumph in the pain he was inflicting—and Captain Heath all the anguish at the discovery of his rival having passed the

night in Blanche's room, and despair at the irremediable destruction of all his hopes.

Throughout the varied scenes of after life, that look was never altogether forgotten; from time to time it would rise in the memory, recalling with it all the poignant sensations which the emotions of years could not efface.

Not a word passed between them. The captain went into his room, and closed the door. Cecil crept to his room, and threw himself undressed upon his bed; there, worn out with the excitement of the last few hours, he sank into a deep and dreamless sleep.

Watching the flood of light gradually spreading over the sky; watching, to use Browning's fine expression,

Day, like a mighty river, flowing in,

Captain Heath sat forlorn at his window; sleepless, motionless, hopeless. Measuring, with cruel calmness, the wreck of all his hopes; and, with stoic bitterness, the extent of his suffering. Learning to look his misery in the face; learning to stifle every vain re-

gret ; learning to bear with manly courage
that which no unmanly wailing could alle-
viate.

Before he rose, he felt with the poet, that

Meeting what must be
Is half commanding it.

CHAPTER XX.

CAPTAIN HEATH WATCHES OVER BLANCHE.

THE next day, Blanche kept to her room, pleading illness. Nothing passed between Cecil and the captain; not even a look. They studiously avoided each other.

By mere accident, the captain overheard one of the grooms tell another that he had seen Mr. Chamberlayne at the Crown Inn, that day. It was a flash of light to him. The visit to the Crown could only have been for the purpose of securing a post-chaise. He resolved to watch.

During the evening, Cecil was as gay as usual, if not gayer; but he was closely watched by the captain, and, when he retired for the

night, he made so many arrangements with Violet and Tom Wincot for the morrow, that the captain's suspicions were confirmed :—

“They are to elope to-night,” he said ; and quietly stole out of the house.

About two hundred yards from the lodge gates, beneath the shade of a magnificent horse-chestnut, he espied, as he had anticipated, a post-chaise in waiting. He went up to the post-boy, and, holding up a crown, he said,—

“Will you answer a question, if paid for it?”

“Why, sir, that depends upon the sort of question.”

“You are employed by Mr. Chamberlayne . . . I want to know whether you are going towards London or Bristol. Will you tell me ?—five shillings for you, if you tell me truly ; broken bones on your return, if you deceive me.”

“Hm ! you 're not going to spoil my job ?”

“Not I ; I wish simply to know the fact.”

“Well, then, hand here the money . . . it 's to London.”

The captain trembled :—

“To London ! I thought so.”

This information seemed to lend him an energy he had not felt for some time—the energy necessary for a struggle. Had Cecil been going to Gretna Green, the captain would have suffered him to depart in peace. But certain suspicions of foul play had tormented him ever since his meeting with Cecil at his bedroom door.

“The villain!” he said to himself. “He has accomplished her ruin, and now does not even intend to marry her. But *she* has a protector, thank God! . . . I will shoot the reprobate this very night.”

He moved away; and, retiring behind the hedge, carefully examined his pistols, which he had brought with him, anticipating some use for them.

Meanwhile, Cecil was placing the ladder for Blanche to descend.

“Hark ye!” said Captain Heath, again approaching the postilion. “As London is your route, I propose accompanying you. There is a crown, to ensure your blindness. I shall get up behind. When you arrive at the first stage, you will promise to pass the word on to the

postilion who succeeds you ; he shall have half-a-crown for his silence ; and so on, till we reach London. Is it a bargain ? ”

“ Ay, surely, sir.”

“ Well, I will walk on. When you get beyond the village, and reach the clump of fir trees that skirt the road to the right of Mrs. St. John’s—you know it ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ There some part of the harness must get out of order, and you must dismount to set it right. While doing so, I will get up behind, and then you may drive on as fast as you please. D’ye hear ? ”

“ Yes, sir ; all right.”

“ Let me add, by way of precaution, that, in case you should ride past, or attempt to betray me, I am very capable of sending a bullet through your head.”

He drew out from his pocket one of his pistols, much to the postilion’s horror, and then replacing it said,—

“ Now we understand each other.”

He strode rapidly on, as he finished this speech, and was soon out of sight.

The night is cold, and the postilion gets impatient; the more so as the recent little conversation has not helped to raise his spirits. To earn a crown by a facile blindness is tempting enough; but he has an uneasy apprehension of something unpleasant; he dislikes the company of one who carries pistols, and seems so determined to use them on slight provocation.

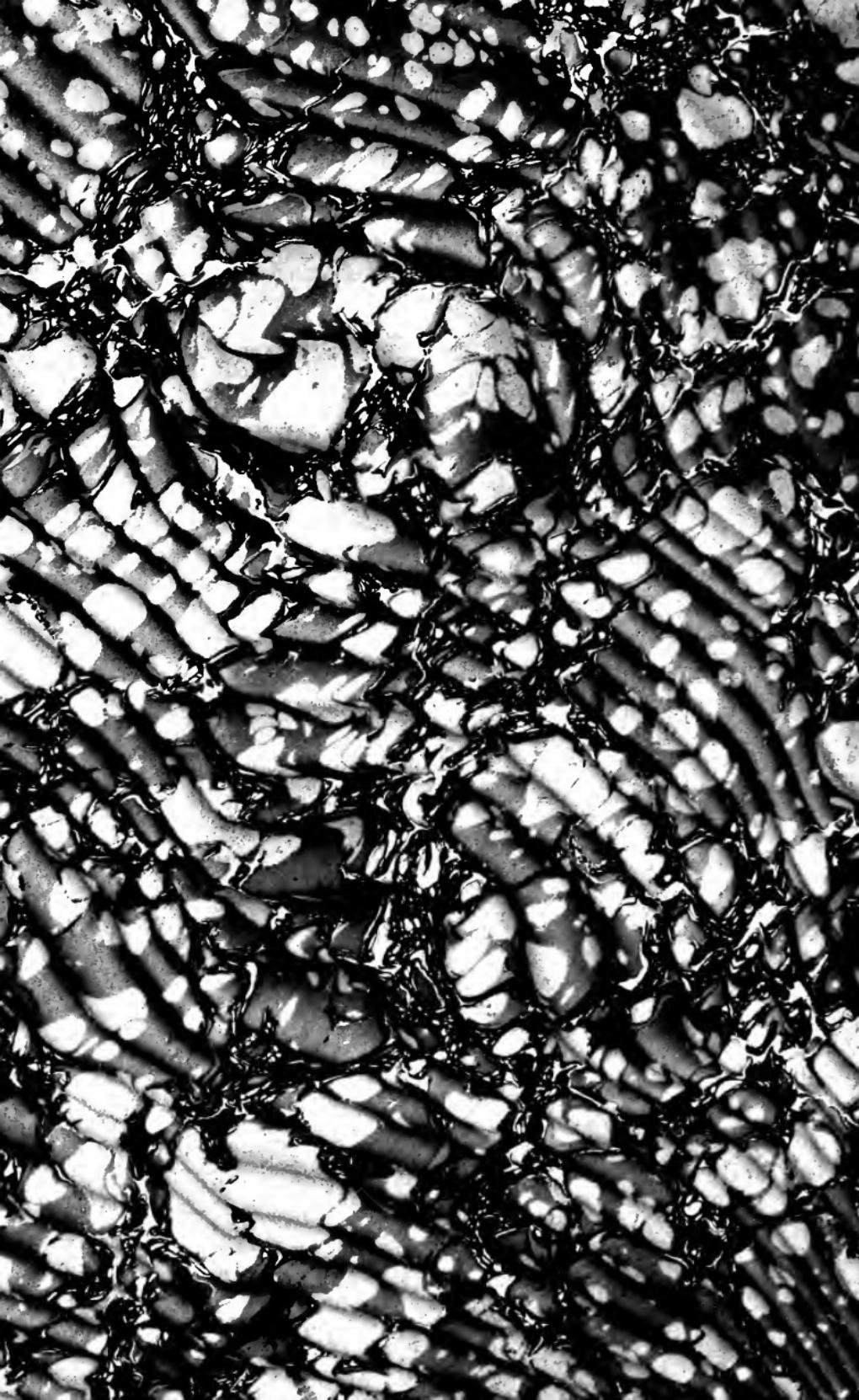
But why tarry the lovers? It is long past the appointed time.

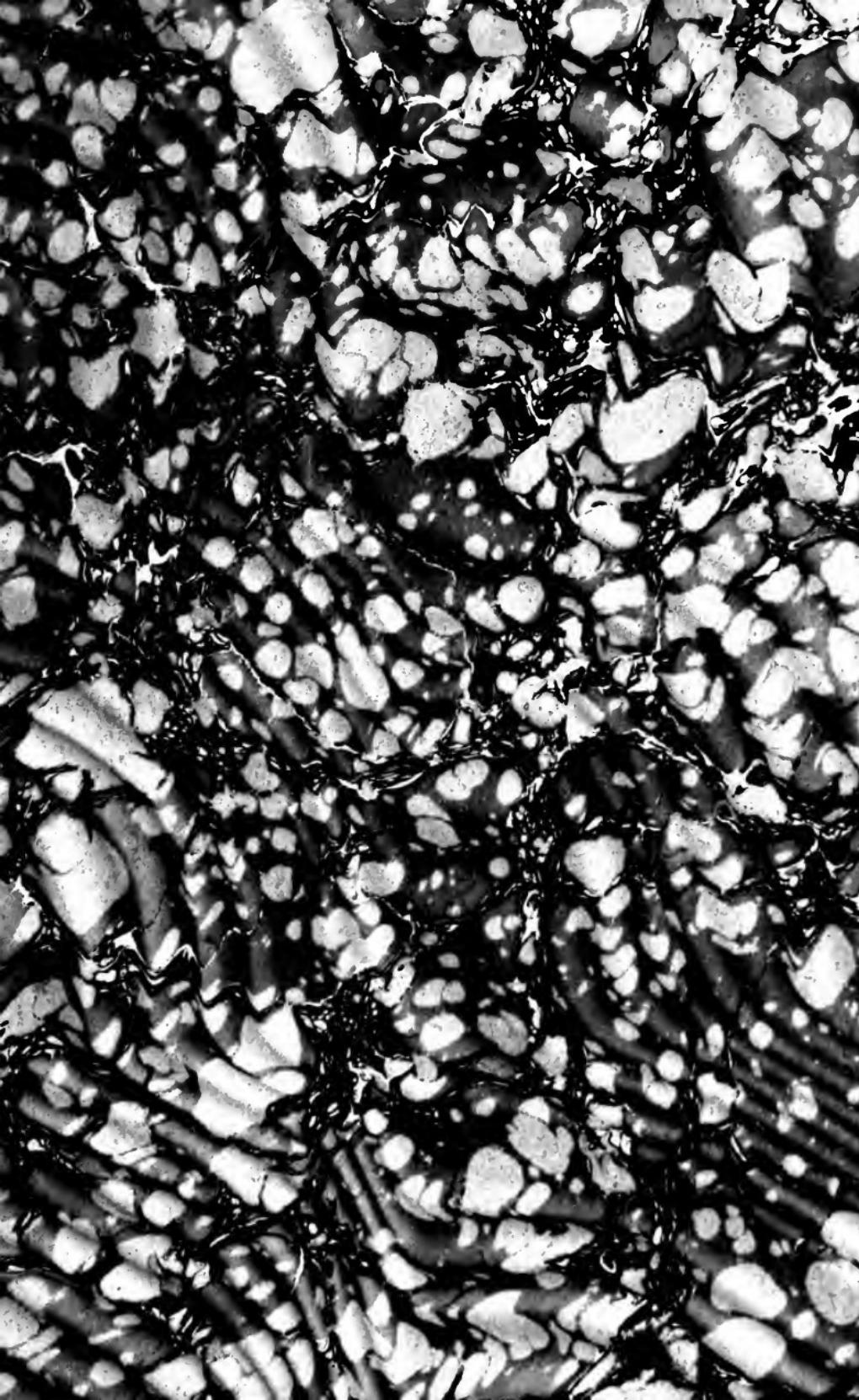
Can they have been detected?—Is the elopement frustrated?

Captain Heath anxiously asks himself these questions; and perhaps the reader shares his impatience. He has a readier means of satisfying his curiosity, however, than the captain had; for he has only to turn to the next volume.

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